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**The “Privileged Dago”?: Race, Citizenship and Sicilians
in the Jim Crow Gulf South, 1870-1924**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HISTORY

by

Jessica Barbata Jackson

June 2017

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Table of Contents

Introduction: The “Privileged Dago”?	1
Chapter 1: From “Proper Citizens” to “Alien Electors”: Reconsidering the Experience of Italians & Sicilians in Louisiana Before & After the Lynchings	23
Chapter 2: “Gentlemen, do you wish to kill me? I have always thought that you were my friends.”: The Lynchings of Italians/Sicilians in Louisiana and Mississippi (1880s-1910)	76
Chapter 3: The “Privileged Dago”: “Electoral Freaks and Monstrosities” in Louisiana’s Disenfranchisement Debates	129
Chapter 4: “We ain’t got no desks for Dagoes!”: Segregating Italians, Sicilians and Schools in Turn-of-the-Century Mississippi	198
Chapter 5: “A Miscegenation Mess”: Legislating Italian Marriages & Whiteness in Louisiana & Alabama	247
Epilogue: Citizenship, Naturalization and Immigration Legislation in the Gulf South to 1924	305
Bibliography	318

Table of Illustrations

“Regarding the Italian Population,” <i>The Mascot</i> , 7 September 1889	35
“Result of Encouraging Immigration,” <i>The Mascot</i> 13 April 1889	37
“From Sunny Italy, Arrival of a Shipload of Immigrants,” <i>Times Democrat</i> , 18 October 1888	46
“From Sunny Italy, Arrival of a Shipload of Immigrants,” <i>Times Democrat</i> , 18 October 1888	74
“Bagnetto Was Hanged on a Tree in Front of the Jail,” <i>Daily Picayune</i> , 16 March 1891	74
Known Victims of Lynching in Louisiana and Mississippi by Race: 1882-1930	93
“Lynch Law,” <i>The Mascot</i> , 14 March 1891	100
“List of the Lynchers,” Report from Acting Italian Consul at New Orleans to the Royal Ambassador at Washington, 13 January 1900	112
“A Bad Easter Egg. The Bloodiest Carnival and Lent in the State of Louisiana,” <i>The Mascot</i> , 29 March 1891	121
Map of Disenfranchisement Debates in Louisiana, 1898	178

Abstract

**The “Privileged Dago”?: Race, Citizenship and Sicilians
in the Jim Crow Gulf South, 1870-1924**

Jessica Barbata Jackson

Although the Jim Crow South is usually considered a story of the black/white color line, it is also an immigration story. This dissertation recovers a history of immigrants in the South who were not totally “white” but who were not “black” either. Where did they fit? And on which side of the color line were Italians relegated when southern states started imposing their Jim Crow laws, like voting restrictions and interracial marriage bans? While not barred from officially naturalizing as U.S. citizens but denied “unofficial” access to citizenship, what can the narrative of the Italian in the Gulf South tell us about the historical construction of race and citizenship?

This dissertation expands the geographic boundaries and traditional focal points of immigration history and southern studies, rectifying the consistent exclusion of the Italian/Sicilian diaspora from southern history, and closes a significant gap in the existing scholarship on Louisiana and the Gulf South. Additionally, I trouble a reliance on strictly nation-state constructions of citizenship and broaden a point of inquiry for deconstructing race. Furthermore, by using a transnational approach, I reconfigure what we have previously understood about the story of Italian immigration: I analyze the lynchings of Italians, the impact of disenfranchisement efforts upon Italians, attempts to segregate Sicilian children from “white” schools,

and the inconsistent way that Sicilians and other Italians were racially categorized within turn-of-the-century miscegenation statutes.

Ultimately, I provide a new framework for understanding the liminal status of racially-marked immigrants like Italians/Sicilians, who I term “racially transient.” This transiency meant that Italians moved among and between racial communities, as they slipped back and forth across the color line in ways that both reinforced it and revealed its instability. This transiency also caused southerners to paradoxically constitute their color and race; the lynchings of Italians represent moments when their “color-status” was contested, meaning Italians were vulnerable to being treated like other “non-whites,” while other moments subverted the racial questionability of Italians’ and progressively aligned them more fully within the “white” mainstream. Close readings of these historical moments reveal both the racial transiency of Italians and that context was crucial.

Dedication

To Josh, my best friend and partner in everything, to our growing family, and to all the adventures still ahead.

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Introduction **The “Privileged Dago”?**

After five Sicilians were lynched in Tallulah, Louisiana in July of 1899, the *Times Democrat* of New Orleans published an article in defense of the lynching: “Citizens Plead Necessity For White Supremacy.”¹ Just the year before, however, while Louisiana legislators disenfranchised African American voters through the implementation of the state’s grandfather clause, an additional provision was passed—subsequently dubbed the “Privileged Dago” Clause—which specifically protected the “foreign white vote” and Italian voting rights. What do we make of this paradox? Within prescriptions of southern “white” supremacy, where did Italians/Sicilians belong? As the title of this work questions, was the “dago” in the Gulf South actually “privileged”? While not barred from officially naturalizing as a U.S. citizen but denied “unofficial” access to citizenship, what can the narrative of the Italian in the Gulf South tell us about the historical construction of race and citizenship?

By 1880, an Italian and predominantly Sicilian, community had become well established in the Gulf South, having arrived in great numbers to replace African Americans on southern plantations after emancipation.² Animated by questions of mobility and identity and engaged with both official metrics of citizenship as well as unofficial constructions of belonging, this dissertation examines how racially marked immigrants like Sicilians and other Italians complicated constructions of race, identity

¹ “Citizens Plead Necessity For White Supremacy,” *Times Democrat*, July 25, 1899.

² Demographically speaking, the Italian community in the South was most concentrated in New Orleans, Louisiana, although I also document the expanse of the Italian community throughout the Gulf region, especially within communities in rural Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

and citizenship in the Jim Crow Gulf South between the 1870s and 1924.³ While our understanding of ethnic history has long been rooted in the regional case study, this project bridges three disparate fields: immigration history, southern history and modern Italian history. Although the Jim Crow South is usually considered a story of the black/white color line, it is also an immigration story, as I recover a history of immigrants in the South who were not totally “white” but who were not “black” either. Where did they fit? And what happened when southern states started imposing their Jim Crow laws, like voting restrictions and interracial marriage bans? On which side of the color line were Sicilians and other Italians relegated?

Thus, I expand the geographic boundaries and traditional focal points of immigration history and southern studies, rectifying the consistent exclusion of the transnational Italian/Sicilian diaspora from southern history, and close a significant gap in the existing scholarship on Louisiana and the Gulf South. Additionally, I trouble a reliance on strictly nation-state constructions of citizenship and broaden a point of inquiry for deconstructing race. Furthermore, by using a transnational approach, I reconfigure what we have previously understood about the story of Italian

³ Although Jim Crow laws remained intact well into the mid-20th century, 1924 marks the end point of this study, at which point Italian immigration was severely restricted as a result of national immigration quotas. These restrictions did not immediately lead to the racializing of Italians in new ways, but, as articulated by Mae Ngai, 1924 did mark the beginning of a new era with regards to how Euro-Americans were racialized (in contrast to Asian and Latino immigrants) and how Italians’ ethnic and racial identities were understood by the state. As a result, this new era of exclusion suggests the beginning of new, though not necessarily less restrictive, modes and practices of racializing Italians (Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*). Ngai’s ambitious socio-legal history of the construction of illegality and the codification of “illegal aliens” between 1924-1965 works to historicize the “quota regime,” which she considers a new means of constructing ethnic and race-based nationalities. Ngai argues, “Euro-American identities turned both on ethnicity—a nationality-based cultural identity that is defined as capable of transformation and assimilation and on a racial identity defined by whiteness” (*Impossible Subjects*, 7). She goes on to explain that Euro-Americans “ethnic and racial identities became uncoupled during the 1920s, [while] Asians’ and Mexicans’ ethnic and racial identities remained conjoined” (*ibid.*). As a result, the era of quota restrictions suggests a new relationship between the state and Euro Americans like Italians, which marks the end point for this study.

immigration: I analyze the lynchings of Italians, the impact of disenfranchisement efforts upon Italians, attempts to segregate Sicilian children from “white” schools, and the inconsistent way that Sicilians and other Italians were racially categorized within turn-of-the-century miscegenation statutes. How did these racially marked immigrants work to both reaffirm and challenge the racially binary mandates of the Jim Crow South?

Critical whiteness scholars have provided us with a much-needed discourse to understand the intermediary racial status of arriving European immigrants at the end of the 19th century. James Barrett and David Roediger consider Eastern and Southern Europeans as an “inbetween” people, meaning that Italians resided somewhere “inbetween” white and black.⁴ According to Barrett and Roediger, this “inbetween” racial status meant that Italians and other Eastern and Southern Europeans suffered from “racial not just ethnic oppression” but also remained securely “white” in terms of their access to “naturalizable citizenship.”⁵ Because of their “inbetween-ness,” their access to Americanization was additionally a process of “becoming white;” both of these processes were complicated by competition over wage labor, questions of “fitness” for political citizenship and a confused immigrant racial consciousness.⁶ Barrett and Roediger remain careful of overstating this racial experience and make a marked effort not to equivocate the racialization of Eastern and Southern Europeans

⁴ “Inbetween Peoples: Race Nationality and the ‘New Immigrant’ Working Class,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16.3 (Spring 1997): 101-40. The term “inbetween” originally appeared in John Higham’s *Strangers in the Land* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981, 169).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 107-8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 104 and 129.

with non-whites; they specify that the “inbetween-ness” of these immigrants put them on a “predictable trajectory” towards ultimately becoming “ethnic.”⁷

Thomas Guglielmo counters this characterization of “inbetween-ness” by suggesting that Italians were “white on arrival;” Guglielmo explains that although Italians were racially suspect, their whiteness protected them from legal discrimination and guaranteed them access to citizenship.⁸ Guglielmo argues that Italians were always white, but that race and color were understood as two distinct and separate modes of classification from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. Color was not based on phenotypic signifiers or pigmentation; instead, it was a social category that granted its possessors certain legal privileges. Because Italians were recognized as “white,” their color-status entitled them to vote, naturalize, and, at least until 1924, immigrate largely without restrictions. Race, on the other hand, was based on biological and geographic markers; seemingly a national identity, it carried with it certain assumptions about inherited characteristics and hierarchically ranked one’s “color-status.” Therefore, Italian “whiteness” was racially qualified since Italians were of the Mediterranean race, which fell below the Nordic race in dominant turn-of-the-century racial taxonomies. This meant that although Italians were granted significant legal privileges as a result of their “whiteness,” but

⁷ Ibid., 104.

⁸ *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

they were simultaneously “racialized” since they were understood as a less-advanced and less-evolved “race.”⁹

Yet, because scholars have focused on the more visible immigrant communities in the urban North, Sicilian and other Italian immigrants have been routinely excised from histories of the South or confined within a monolithic category of “whiteness.” As the multifaceted racial structure of the Gulf South requires a more qualified terminology, I move beyond Barrett and Roediger’s concept of “in-between,” which supposes a more static view of race, and Guglielmo’s theory of “white on arrival.” In fact, Italians in the Gulf South were neither “in between” white and black, nor were they always white. Instead, I provide a new framework for understanding the liminal status of racially-marked immigrants like Italians/Sicilians, who I term “racially transient.” This transiency meant that Italians moved among and between racial communities, as they slipped back and forth across the color line in ways that both reinforced it and revealed its instability. This transiency also caused southerners to paradoxically constitute their color and race; the lynchings of Italians represent moments when their “color-status” was contested, meaning Italians were vulnerable to being treated like other “non-whites,” while other moments subverted

⁹ Louise DeSalvo (“Color White/Complexion Dark,” in *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America*, ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York: Routledge, 2003) and Matthew Frye Jacobson (*Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) make similar contributions to whiteness studies. DeSalvo argues, “Just as there are several grades of hamburger meat, there were (are) several shades of whiteness” (28). Jacobson explains, there were a “multiplicity of white races”; one’s race informed and ranked one’s status within the category of “white.” Jacobson compares “the racial odysseys of...the Irish, Armenians, Italians, Poles, Syrians, Greeks, Ruthenians, Sicilians, Finns [with] a host of others. [They] came ashore in the United States as ‘free white persons’ under the terms of reigning naturalization law, yet whose racial credentials were not equivalent to those of the Anglo-Saxon ‘old stock’ who laid proprietary claim to the nation’s founding documents and hence to its stewardship”

the racial questionability of Italians’ and progressively aligned them more fully within the “white” mainstream. Demonstrating how contingent the racialization of these immigrants was raises the unsettling possibility that the Jim Crow binary itself might have been much more fragile than its protectors wanted to imagine.¹⁰

Part of my revision of the common racial characterization of Italians requires moving beyond a strict reliance on the concept of race. In order to do this, I suggest citizenship as an additionally useful metric, although my use of the concept includes more than a limited nation-state articulation of citizenship.¹¹ While I regard passports and identity documents as one facet of “formal” citizenship, I also consider the impact of movement, migration, and the crossing of national boundaries upon formulations of citizenship, specifically with regards to ascribing a national identity upon arriving immigrants like Italians. In fact, many of these arriving Sicilians and other Italians to the Gulf South lacked a coherent national identity as Italian citizens when they immigrated, yet they were named as such by U.S. immigration officers.

¹⁰ The time period of this study provides an apt lens for investigating the extent to which legal binarism in the South incorporated and accounted for immigrants. By looking beyond simply how U.S. policy impacted Italians, this study seeks to uncover how Italians impacted the South as well: did the “racial transiency” of Italian immigrants hinder the racial binarism of Jim Crow?

¹¹ In crafting my own definition of citizenship, I use Andreas Fahrmeir’s valuable interpretations and characterizations of citizenship: “formal citizenship,” “political citizenship,” “economic citizenship” and “social citizenship.” Fahrmeir intervenes in the existing historiography by claiming, “Rather than being different facets of one ‘citizenship’, dimensions of citizenship rights were (and continue to be) available to different groups which overlap with the community of formal citizens only in part (Andreas Fahrmeir, *Citizenship: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 2). As Fahrmeir explains, the concept of “formal citizenship,” the legal relationship between individuals and the state as documented by a passport or other legal document, first emerged around 1800 and evolved from eighteenth century British and French political and economic precursors. Beyond such “formal” and more traditional articulations of citizenship, Fahrmeir defines “political citizenship” as access and participation in the political process, “economic citizenship” as the right to earn an income, while “social citizenship” includes direct and indirect support from the state. Of these categories, I am most interested in access to “formal citizenship” and “political citizenship” because of their influence upon fixing identity and their relevance for understanding racial categorization; I consider passports, identity documents, immigration policies and access to voting privileges as central to legal, nation-state articulations of citizenship.

This process—which I identify as “ascribed nationality”—flags moments where labels of imposed citizenship, activated by the movement across borders, remained uncoupled from a migrant’s own self-identification. Additionally, this “ascribed nationality” emphasizes how the movement across borders stimulated a hardening and even narrowing of national identity through the re-inscription of national boundaries and the imposition of nationality upon migrating individuals. My work, therefore, contributes to the existing literature on the transnational development of *Italianità* or Italian consciousness and Italian identity.¹² I reveal the extent to which moments of crisis necessitated, as a means of survival, a restructuring of civic identity. In this regard, certain Italian immigrants, who may not have initially understood themselves as Italian citizens would eventually appeal to the privileges of their ascribed identity. Regardless of region of origin, under threat of lynching or disenfranchisement, Sicilians and other Italians in the Gulf South ultimately bound together in solidarity and forged trans-regional alliances.

Nevertheless, the vast literature regarding conceptions of citizenship remains concerned primarily with this more official version and with how the nation-state constructed definitions of and justified exclusions from citizenship rights. Therefore, in an effort to address this gap in the historiography, I offer “informal citizenship” as an important counter-category to the more common category of “formal

¹² As I discuss shortly, Italians immigrated without a clear sense of the Italian state. As a result of their “New World” interactions, rather than simply developing an identity as Italian Americans, they developed a sense of being Italian, which blurred the lines of their more regional and local identities (Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*, Chapter 2). See also Humbert S Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnics: the Italian Americans* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

citizenship.”¹³ I define “informal citizenship” as the social and unofficial consideration of someone as foreign, including instances where “unofficial” actors participated in constructing citizenship and where the policing of citizenship resulted from more informal or extralegal practices.¹⁴ I additionally suggest that “informal citizenship” also involves those instances where individual themselves, like immigrants, navigated the strategies of exclusion, participated in formulating their own understanding of citizenship and performed their role as citizen.¹⁵

Therefore, in addition to considering the “racial transiency” of Italians, I investigate how “unofficial” actors participated in constructing Italian citizenship, and how Italian immigrants themselves participated in formulating their understanding of and performing their citizenship. While Italians may have been able to access “formal citizenship,” their rights to “formal citizenship” were greatly debated, and Italians

¹³ In developing this concept, I bridge Mae Ngai’s “alien citizenship” with the theories of Latino Studies Culturalists and concepts of “diasporic citizenship” (Ngai, *Impossible Subject*; Renato Rosaldo, “Cultural Citizenship and Educational Democracy,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (August 1, 1994): 403; William Vincent Flores and Rina Benmayor, *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997); Lok Siu, “Diasporic Cultural Citizenship: Chineseness and Belonging in Central America and Panama,” *Social Text* 19, no. 4 69 (December 21, 2001)). In suggesting their concept of “cultural citizenship,” Latino Studies Culturalists emphasize Latino agency in claiming space and rights, while diasporic cultural citizenship speaks to the possible multiplicity of citizen-based identities. Ngai makes reference to the idea of “cultural citizenship” by way of introducing her own term “alien citizenship,” which she describes as a “condition of racial otherness, a badge of foreignness that could not be shed” (Ngai, *Impossible Subject*, 8). These theories additionally link to Bridget Anderson’s concept of citizenship as both a legal and a “normative moral status” (Bridget Anderson, “Linking Citizenship, Migration, Labor, Border and Carceral Studies,” Seminar, 2016-17 Andrew W. Mellon Foundation John E. Sawyer Seminar on Non-Citizenship, 4 October 2016). Anderson suggests that the politics of citizenship include a rhetoric of “undeserving,” which informs a vernacular that only offers support, protection and citizenship rights to “good” and “deserving” migrants (Ibid.; Bridget Anderson, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Citizenship and the Politics of Exclusion,” Lecture, 2016-17 Andrew W. Mellon Foundation John E. Sawyer Seminar on Non-Citizenship, Santa Cruz, CA, 6 October 2016; Bridget Anderson, *Us and Them?: The Dangerous Politics of Immigration Control* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)).

¹⁴ This remains similar to Ngai’s concept of “alien citizens,” those, she explains, who were in fact formally and legally citizens but were “alien in the eyes of the nation” (Ngai, *Impossible Subject*, 8). In addition to this reading of citizenship, I consider “informal citizenship” to include the performative aspect of civic identity.

¹⁵ This is not meant to suggest that “informal” operations necessarily functioned as an opposing force to “formal” procedures. Rather, citizenship, far from being a monolithic or imposed category, was in fact produced through these dynamic processes and this multiplicity of influences; “informal citizenship” served to both preserve and disrupt official articulations of “formal citizenship.”

were variously denied “informal citizenship.” In part a semantic revision of Guglielmo’s “white on arrival” argument, this focus on citizenship works to re-center the narrative of Italian discrimination beyond a strictly racial explanation and serves to additionally incorporate the political and economic factors that contributed to the contestations over Italian civic identity.

Race, Place & Context

The investigation of these themes takes on new meaning by locating this story in the Gulf South, especially since contestations over citizenship readily played out in the region in the post-Reconstruction era. Due in large part to the region’s complicated racial politics, both “formal” and “unofficial” citizenships were contentiously being articulated (and rearticulated), which led to the rights of citizenship being both subverted as well as reaffirmed. However, we must begin by defining the boundaries of the “Gulf South,” for which there are two main debates: the first demarcates the Gulf South regionally to include Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, eastern Texas and the states (in their entirety) that border the Gulf of Mexico.¹⁶ The other school considers regionality an artificial grouping and suggests that the Gulf South should only include those regions that actually border the Gulf and therefore share the distinctive identity of the region.

In regards to the latter claim, scholars contend that the Gulf South developed a distinctive identity and flexible social hierarchy as a result of its complicated

¹⁶ Samuel C Hyde, *Sunbelt Revolution: The Historical Progression of the Civil Rights Struggle in the Gulf South, 1866-2000* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003).

historical legacies: French, Spanish and American colonial regimes, three systems and histories of racial classification. From its early settlement under the French, the combination of Native American, European, and African cultural influences separated the region from other Anglicized colonies.¹⁷ Along with competing identities, imperial inattention and neglect, the region was marked by a certain “rouge colonialism.”¹⁸ Furthermore, environmental conditions led the Gulf territories to employ rather atypical slavery practices, which meant that slaves in the French and Spanish colonial regions generally held greater power over their daily lives than those in British mainland slave societies.¹⁹ In particular, Louisiana’s large population of free persons of color or *gens de couleur libre* was an additional marker of the region’s peculiarity.²⁰ These competing groups, discourses and dynamics complicated race-making and contributed to a regional distinctiveness marked by a unique fluidity and

¹⁷ For those who argue that Louisiana challenged British colonial patterns, see the following: Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana the Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Michael Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

¹⁸ Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire French Colonial New Orleans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

¹⁹ With regards to the extent that slavery in French Louisiana challenged British models, see Daniel H Usner, *Indians, Settlers & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Virginia Meacham Gould, “‘A Chaos of Iniquity and Discord’: Slave and Free Women of Color in the Spanish Ports of New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola,” in *The Devil’s Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Michele Gillespie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 232–246. For more on the fluidity that persisted when the Spanish acquired the region in the latter half of the eighteenth century, see Kimberly S Hanger, “Patronage, Property and Persistence: The Emergence of a Free Black Elite in Spanish New Orleans,” *Slavery and Abolition* 17.1 (1996): 44–64; Joan M. Martin, “Placage and the Louisiana Gens de Couleur Libre: How Race and Sex Defined the Lifestyles of Free Women of Color,” in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana’s Free People of Color*, ed. Sybil Kein (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 57–70. For more on how slavery continued to operate differently in the region from elsewhere in the American South, see Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

²⁰ Dawdy’s *Building the Devil’s Empire French Colonial New Orleans*; Gould, “‘A Chaos of Iniquity and Discord’: Slave and Free Women of Color in the Spanish Ports of New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola.”

flexibility, a regional identity that persisted even after the U.S. acquired the region in 1803.

As a result, historians have since considered the Gulf region, and Louisiana in particular, as anomalous to the racial mandates of the South, an eccentric defier of racial and social customs. In fact, New Orleans was known at the turn-of-the-century as a place where people could “break free from the constraints of civilized morality, [where they were] allowed to take a vacation from the requirements of Jim Crow while maintaining the pretense that white supremacy and racial segregation were absolute necessities in their home communities.”²¹ The Gulf South was understood as an in-between region—neither fully American nor entirely European, one that exemplified a certain adherence towards color segregation, while also contesting and subverting the doctrine of racial binaries.²²

As a result of historical legacies as well as historiographical debates, I use the term Gulf South to denote both cultural and geographic conditions. I do consider that the developing culture in the Gulf South was marked by a similar fluidity and hybridity as New Orleans, which would have allowed for a more fluid racial experience for arriving immigrants. Therefore, I term my region of study as the Gulf

²¹ Alecia P Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 198.

²² However, scholars have begun to contend that southern race relations in general should be reevaluated for atypicality, rather than presuming Louisiana to be the perennial outsider. Historians like Alecia P. Long and Jennifer Spear have begun to hypothesize that although the racial order in New Orleans has generally been perceived as unique, ambiguous and fluid, this was in fact more representative of colonial race relations in general than has been previously understood (Jennifer M Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920*). Both challenge Louisiana’s status as the perennial outsider within Southern history and suggest that Louisiana was less atypical than scholars have previously considered. This perspective attempts to lay claim to Louisiana’s racial typicality, interconnectedness and comparability to the greater South.

South because of the presence of this distinctive regional culture, due to French and Spanish cultural influences, the region's proximity to the Caribbean, the urban Creole tradition, a certain "frontier fluidity" and prevalent Catholicism.²³ However, I additionally incorporate locations less culturally similar to the Gulf Coast, such as Birmingham and Northern Mississippi, traditionally more characteristic of the "Deep South" than the "Gulf South." This results from two factors—in part, I have chosen to incorporate those regions in the South in which large Italian immigrant communities resided, Birmingham being one of those locations. And yet, despite locating Birmingham more decidedly in the "Deep South," New Orleans remained a touchstone for these disparate immigrant communities, as Italians from Mississippi, Alabama and surrounding areas still sought assistance from the Italian Consulate in New Orleans in times of crisis. Furthermore, I consider the states that border the Gulf (in their entirety) as the Gulf South in order to further demonstrate the connectivity between Louisiana and the South by citing the presence of such racial anomalies (that may have previously marked Louisiana as an isolated outlier in the South) within other regions of the Gulf States.²⁴ Therefore, while the demographic and historical peculiarities of the Gulf South remain relevant to this project, I consider that Louisiana and the Gulf were part of a larger web of continental influences.²⁵

²³ Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order in Early New Orleans*.

²⁴ By way of contributing to the historiographical debates, this project works to demonstrate that the Gulf South may in fact have been more representative of southern race relations than has been previously understood.

²⁵ This is similar to the theory put forth by Adam Rothman in *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South*. In addition to emphasizing the interconnectedness between the Deep South and other slave-holding regions, Rothman's work argues that the unique necessities of sugar production in Louisiana led to the development of a more flexible and distinctive brand of slavery in the region. (Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South*).

Additionally, the Italian narrative in the Gulf South also represents the influence of regional politics upon national legislation, which provides further evidence to support the notion of the Gulf States' connectivity with their surrounding areas.

Perhaps an unlikely demographic in the Gulf South, nearly 500,000 foreign-born Italians resided in the United States by 1900, a number that would triple by 1910. A significant number of those Italian immigrants chose to make their home in the South. The largest contingent of Italian immigrants settled in Louisiana—2,000 per year arrived in between 1880-1898 as a result of intense recruitment to enlist European immigrants to replace emancipated slave labor on southern, especially sugarcane, plantations.²⁶ By 1930, nearly half of all foreign families in Louisiana were Italian.²⁷ A much smaller, but still noteworthy population of Italians settled in Alabama—by 1910, 2,696 Italians resided in the state (out of 20,000 foreign born); half of those Italians lived in Birmingham or the surrounding Jefferson County.²⁸ Italian immigrants also settled along the eastern bank of the Mississippi River in southern Mississippi, as well as among the coastal communities of the Florida's panhandle.

Of those Italians who immigrated to the U.S. in the late-nineteenth century, many arrived with a complicated sense of nation and identity. Italy, the peninsula that was home to many countries, cultures and distinctly different languages, had only

²⁶ Anthony V Margavio and Jerome J Salomone, *Bread and Respect: The Italians of Louisiana* (Gretna, La.: Pelican Pub. Co., 2002), 37.

²⁷ Dino Cinel, "Italians in the South: The Alabama Case," *Italian Americana* 9, no. 1 (October 1, 1990): 7-24. (8).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

unified under a constitutional monarchy in 1861, a political and territorial process that was not completed until 1871. In fact, national unification under the Piedmont royalty was less of a popular movement and more an alliance between the propertied elite and the state, so much so that statesman Massimo d'Azeglio famously said, "We have made Italy; now we must make Italians."²⁹

Despite d'Azeglio's prescription, unification exacerbated the "southern question" as Italy's nation-building project failed to make Italians out of southerners. Politically, the extremely restricted franchise meant that only 2% of Italian subjects were eligible to vote in the first parliamentary election in Italy.³⁰ Economically, while northerners were more able to adapt to Piedmontization, the economic disparity between the North and the South meant that Piedmont's protective tariff and free trade legislation resulted in aggravating the South's economic problems.³¹ Offering further insight into the extent that unification was imposed on the South, southern revolutionaries persisted in their efforts to challenge the legitimacy of the Piedmont conquest and participated in a brutal civil war in the 1860s, dubbed by the Italian state as the "Brigands War." The very act of naming a war against unification the "Brigands War," explained the conflict to the newly unified nation as a war for the purpose of subduing southern banditry, which worked to conceptualize the entire South as a land of criminals. It cast southern Italians as outside the new nation, rather than within. Because of these efforts undertaken to unify "Italy" through the

²⁹ Spencer Di Scala, *Italy from Revolution to Republic: 1700 to the Present* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2004); Derek Edward Dawson Beales and Eugenio F Biagini, *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy* (Harlow: Longman, 2002).

³⁰ John Santore, *Modern Naples: A Documentary History, 1799-1999* (New York: Italica Press, 2001), 199.

³¹ Di Scala, *Italy from Revolution to Republic*, 132.

diversionary “othering” of the South, compounded by increased taxes, land hunger, environmental calamities, and fear of conscription, the Italian state effectively disenfranchised the southern peasantry, thus distinctly linking unification with the beginning of the large-scale departure of Southern Italians.³²

Owing to these factors, Italy, as a cultural and linguistic unit, did not exist for many Italian immigrants, especially those from southern Italy, but instead, Italian identity was comprised of what has been termed *campanilismo*, “a view of the world that includes a reluctance to extend social, cultural and economic contacts beyond points from which the parish or village bell could still be heard.”³³ Italian immigrants understood their sense of place, at least initially, in terms of region or village, amplified by the fact that different regions were marked by differences in dialects, cuisine and social practices.³⁴ Offering linguistic evidence for this more local sense of civic identity, leading migration scholar Donna Gabaccia points out that modern Italians use the same word for village (*paese*) as they do for country.³⁵ In her attempt

³² Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871 to the Present*. See also Davis, “Italy 1796-1870,” and Di Scala, *Italy from Revolution to Republic*. Additionally, Southern support for the revolution had been predicated upon the revolutionary leaders’ “promise of land distribution” a promise that went largely unfulfilled in the aftermath of unification. Consequently, because of the gross mishandling of these regional realities and obstacles, the efforts to Italianize the nation remained incomplete and largely superficial (Luciano J Iorizzo and Salvatore Mondello, *The Italian Americans* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980), 20).

³³ Joseph Lopreato, *Italian Americans* (New York: Random House, 1970), 104; see also Humbert S Nelli, *Italians in Chicago, 1880-1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

³⁴ In fact, regional identity has been cited as a factor, at least in the beginning, that prevented the development of common action, collective consciousness and cohesion in the face of discrimination once they arrived in the United States. (See Lopreato, Chapter 5).

³⁵ “Is Everyone Nowhere? Nomads, Nations, and the Immigrant Paradigm of United States History.” *Journal of American History*. 86.3 (December 1999): 1115-37. Gabaccia continues, “Nor is it accidental that the modern Italian words for citizenship (*cittadinanza*) and citizen (*cittadino*) originally defined loyalty to a city, not to a nation (*nazione* or *nazionalita*), people (*popolo*), or race (*stirpe* or *razza*)” (Donna R Gabaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas* (London: UCL Press, 2000), 3). For other scholars who suggest that this sense of being Italian developed as a result of their “New World” interactions, not before or even upon their migration, see T. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival*, Humbert S Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnic: the Italian Americans* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), and Joseph Lopreato, *Italian Americans* (New York: Random House, 1970).

to challenge the primordial assumptions of the Italian national identity and the “tyranny of the nation,” Gabaccia emphasizes the degree to which Italian immigrants claimed a more localized identity but were given an Italian national identity by official and unofficial labels in their host-countries.³⁶

At the same time and as immigration scholars have comprehensively documented, Italians, like other European immigrants in this period were consigned to an intermediary racial status upon their arrival.³⁷ Scholars cite a number of factors as responsible for this anti-Italian sentiment: Catholicism, Italians’ inclination towards seasonal or temporary migration, Italians’ claimed unassimilability, as well as the presumed association between Italians and criminality.³⁸ Resulting from this “outsider” status, I additionally chart the development of this *Italianità* in the Gulf South by addressing when and how Sicilians and other southern Italians began to conceptualize themselves as Italian.

³⁶ Gabaccia additionally notes that “most had familial, local, regional, and religious—but not national—identities: they were Catholics, Sicilians or Sambucari” (Gabaccia, “Is Everyone Nowhere? Nomads, Nations, and the Immigrant Paradigm of United States History,” 1120). Gabaccia continues, “Many became ‘Italian’ only when they left home; when they returned, neighbors called them ‘germanesi’ [German] or ‘americani’ [American]” (Gabaccia, “Is Everyone Nowhere? Nomads, Nations, and the Immigrant Paradigm of United States History,” 1116).

³⁷ Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*.

³⁸ For a discussion of the impact of Catholicism upon anti-Italian sentiment in northern, largely Protestant cities, see Salvatore John LaGumina, *Wop!: A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination in the United States* (Toronto: Guernica, 1999), Chapter. 4). For a discussion of Italians’ seasonal migration, see Mark Wyman, *Round-trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). For a provocative discussion of Italians’ limited efforts to seek American citizenship, see Dino Cinel (*The National Integration of Italian Return Migration, 1870-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Cinel contends that Southern Italians understood their emigration as strictly temporary and never even contemplated permanently settling in the United States. Cinel claims, those who did choose to permanently settle in the U.S. did so because of a failed attempt to return to Italy. Furthermore, because most Italians understood their American sojourn as temporary, they made few overtures to integrate; this contributed to the Italians’ inability to integrate and increased their discriminatory treatment. Thus marked by the host country and themselves, Italians self-identified and were labeled as outsiders.

In Chapter 1, in part an act of recovery, I present a more comprehensive rendering of the oft overlooked, specifically southern and transnational history of the Italian/Sicilian diaspora. Unlike the experience of Italian immigrants in the North, the experience of Italian immigrants in the Gulf South was originally characterized by a positive relationship with native-born southerners. This initially positive reception of Italians in the Gulf South would readily shift over time. Chapter 2, which uses the March 14, 1891 mass lynching of eleven Italians in New Orleans, Louisiana as the primary case study, also addresses the other lynchings of Italians across the Gulf South between the 1880s-1910s. Chapter 3, employing the 1898 Constitutional Convention in Louisiana as its focal point, chronicles the passage of Louisiana's "Privileged Dago" Clause, which worked to protect Italian-voting rights over those of African Americans. In Chapter 4, utilizing 1907 Sumrall, Mississippi as its central incident, I investigate the efforts to segregate Sicilian (and Catholic) children from a white (and Protestant) school. Chapter 5, using the *Rollins vs State* case in 1921 Jefferson County, Alabama as its case study, I investigate the extent to which Italians and Sicilians problematized miscegenation laws in the South. Close readings of these historical moments, when the meaning of race itself was in effect up for grabs, reveals both the racial transiency of Italians and that context was crucial.

A Note on Sources

In pursuing this research, I cast a broad net—my main resources were newspapers, including local, national, African American and Italian-language presses.

I additionally used census and marriage records, church records, court records and diplomatic correspondence between Italian ambassadors and the US State Department. My sources were both top down and bottom up, as I conducted research at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, while I also sifted through archival ephemera in order to chronicle the Sicilian benevolent societies in New Orleans. While on a research trip to Birmingham, Alabama that included several dead ends at the public library, the Samford Law Library and the district court and county court archives, at the Alabama State Archives I finally located the original court transcripts for the infamous *Rollins v State* case, which few other scholars have consulted.

A great deal of my inquiry relies on analyzing the local discourse on race and citizenship. In order to establish the Louisiana discourse, in addition to citing regional newspapers from around the state, I rely most heavily upon the New Orleans press. The history of the New Orleans press makes for complicated research. As many as thirty-two different dailies were published at various points during the last quarter of the nineteenth century; editors were hired and fired and worked at competing papers, just as certain proprietors simultaneously owned multiple papers around the city. For the period in question, the main newspapers from which I quote are the *Daily Picayune*, *Times Democrat*, *Daily States* and *New Orleans Item*. The *Daily Picayune* was the longest running daily in New Orleans; it began as a penny press in 1837 and modeled itself after the *New York Herald* and the *New York Sun*. The *Democrat*, which began as an anti-lottery paper and anti-Carpetbagger paper, later merged with the *Times*, which had originally been established as pro-Union press; as a result, the

Times Democrat emerged in 1881.³⁹ Historians (and contemporaries) credit the *Daily Picayune* and the *Times Democrat* with maintaining the greatest level of objectivity in their reporting.⁴⁰ The *Daily States* was founded as an anti-lottery paper by Major Henry James Hearsey, reported as a staunch bigot and known for his flagrant editorials on behalf of white supremacy. The *Daily Item* was a pro-lottery paper and was described as being more liberal and less biased than the *States*.⁴¹ The *Daily Picayune*, the *Times Democrat* and the *Daily States* were the “big three of Newspaper Row” located on Camp Street in 1890s New Orleans; the “big three” enjoyed the highest circulation rates in the city (respectively and in that order) with a combined daily circulation of 49,488 and a combined Sunday circulation of 70,680 in 1891.⁴²

In terms of my choice in source material, I do acknowledge that print culture provides its own set of problems, such as representing only a literate, upper and middle class, and potentially government-influenced perspective. However, press discourse remains one of the main records for the attitudes of established white society. Comparing various press sources across New Orleans, Louisiana and the Gulf South allows me to track the patterns of public language and document trends in the manner in which Sicilian, Italian and other immigrants were characterized.

³⁹ The question of whether or not to renew the Louisiana State Lottery was at the center of Louisianan politics in the 1890s; largely, the lottery controversy was an economic debate that questioned the lottery company's monopoly and their control of lottery funds. Anti-lottery forces also considered this “chartered form of gambling” as a “corrupting” and “lawless” effect on community life in New Orleans (John S Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, (Chicago; New York: Lewis Pub. Co., 1922), Chapter 31).

⁴⁰ These rivals merged to form the present-day *Times Picayune* in 1914.

⁴¹ These rival papers merged to form the *States-Item* in 1958, which later merged with the *Times Picayune* in 1980 (John Wilds, *Afternoon Story: A Century of the New Orleans States-Item* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976).

⁴² Richard Campanella, *Time and Place in New Orleans: Past Geographies in the Present Day* (Gretna, La.: Pelican Pub. Co., 2002), 149; Thomas Ewing Dabney, *One Hundred Great Years; the Story of the Times-Picayune from Its Founding to 1940*, (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1944), 313-14. I make reference to these histories and biases throughout the project.

In addition to utilizing press records, a certain amount of my investigation centers on court rulings and legal statutes. Even so, I remain cautious against overstating the significance of certain legal moments.⁴³ Additionally, rather than reading law as “self-legitimizing,” I consider the permeability of legal classifications. Although the legal code, by definition, purports to represent fixed and definite categories such as “citizen” and “noncitizen” or “black” and “white,” in reality, such groupings would have most certainly enjoyed varying degrees of slippage. Furthermore, rather than categorically assuming that miscegenation or disenfranchisement laws were necessarily representative of popular sentiment, or assuming that such laws were inherently the product of elite forces, regional contexts remain a focal point of this dissertation.⁴⁴ Historians must still exercise caution against collapsing the categories of legality with identity, which can often obscure the actual lived experience. On the other hand, legal statutes allow us to ascertain how society thought its members ought to behave, and more specifically, they allow us to determine the social values and attitudes of the elite that made and shaped the law. By

⁴³ In her effort to stress the continuity of exclusions across the nineteenth-century, Barbara Welke cautions that landmark pieces of legislations do not necessarily change “the borders of belonging” (Barbara Young Welke, *Law and the Borders of Belonging in the Long Nineteenth Century United States* (Cambridge [U.K.]; New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 156).

⁴⁴ For example, Aristide Zolberg, among other historians of the exclusion era, notes that the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 was the result of pressure from a combination of organized labor forces, social and intellectual elites, Populist politicians and rural constituents. (Aristide R Zolberg, “The Great Wall Against China: Responses to the First Immigration Crisis, 1885-1925,” in *How Many Exceptionalisms?: Explorations in Comparative Macroanalysis* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008). Just as Zolberg describes this coalition of restrictionists as “strange bedfellows” united across the class divide through shared moral, political and nationalist sentiment, we must be conscious of the fact that law does not always allow insight into the presence of social and political complexities. Furthermore, a growing trend suggests that combining the approaches of legal and social historians may prove especially useful. As Jennifer Spear articulates, in order to get at the “truth,” we must perform a two-pronged analysis by examining “how officials codified...ideas into the laws of a given society and how the members of that society operated within and around that...social order” (Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order in Early New Orleans*, 315).

remaining careful against presuming the staticity of the resulting social relations and civic identity, the power of law to structure experience becomes a dynamic process.

In this regard, I suggest that the legal framework of the postbellum era in the Gulf South offers insight in the very real and powerful significance—it bespeaks an idea, a desire, an attitude and a prescription for behavior.⁴⁵ Although law does not stand in for description, I credit these legislative moments for shaping, informing and defining the social framework and operations within this era. Throughout my investigation, I additionally remain aware of the tendency to consider legal statutes as representative of a static moment. Instead, I consider law as representing a moving target, whereby, even as a legal statute changed, opinions and practices did not inherently shift in tandem with legislative adjustments. Such factors require recognition that “unofficial” actors remained active in the implementation (or lack thereof) of legal statutes.

A Note on Terminology

Finally, a note on language: I complicate the language of “Italian” throughout this project in order to account for the fact that the majority of the historical actors in my study were specifically Sicilian. Because of the demographics, I refer to groups of actors in my study as “Sicilians and other Italians,” while I only specify that an individual was Sicilian when I have specific evidence of his ancestry or place or

⁴⁵ For more on the significance of analyzing legal statutes, see Peter Winthrop Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Nancy F Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Welke, *Law and the Borders of Belonging in the Long Nineteenth Century United States*, 8; *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, 12.

origin. However, I do use the term “Italian” to more generally reference attitudes, discourse and legislation that impacted Sicilians as well as other Italians.

Chapter 1
From “Proper Citizens” to “Alien Electors”:
Reconsidering the Experience of Italians & Sicilians in Louisiana
Before & After the Lynchings

On the morning of March 14, 1891, a mob of 8,000-10,000 New Orleanians stormed the Parish Prison in search of Italians. Incensed by the court’s acquittal of nine alleged Mafia members believed responsible for killing the New Orleans Police Chief David Hennessy, some Italians were shot, others hanged—within hours, eleven Italians were dead at the hands of vigilante violence, resulting in one of the largest mass lynchings in U.S. history.¹ Scholarly explanations for the lynching indicate consensus: Matthew Frye Jacobson contends that a prevalent belief in “Italians’ *innate* criminality not only allowed, but indeed prompted, the brutal lynching.”² As Richard Gambino argues, “The cycle of fear was whirling at high speed in New Orleans in 1890...[and] the *long-simmering* anti-Italian hysteria burst into an ugly frenzy.”³ Jerre Mangione and Ben Morreale explain that characterizations of Italians were changing during the 1880s and that these increasingly negative perceptions were “most obvious in New Orleans.”⁴ Without distinguishing between regional variances in (public) discourse about Italians, or analyzing the discourse about Italians from the pre-lynching era, one could reach a similar conclusion: the 1891 lynching was the result of long-standing, anti-Italian sentiment and racial animosity. However, this

¹ I elaborate at length on the 1891 lynching and other lynchings of Italians/Sicilians in Chapter 2.

² *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 56; author’s emphasis.

³ *Vendetta: The True Story of the Largest Lynching in U.S. History* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 255; emphasis mine.

⁴ *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 201.

established interpretation glosses over the fact that the lynching and ensuing anti-Italian discourse within Louisiana were something fundamentally new.

Since immigration scholars tend to concentrate on the more visible immigrant communities in the North, the narrative of Italians in Louisiana has been left largely unexplored.⁵ Beyond the specific historiography of the 1891 lynching, when scholars do engage with the narrative of anti-Italian violence in Louisiana, they often do so as a means of providing evidence to support a master narrative of anti-Italian prejudice.⁶ Yet, these scholarly interpretations remain in large part the result of overlooking or misreading local, Louisiana sources. Consequently, reliance on this established immigration narrative, which actually represents a regionally specific northern discourse, has misrepresented these lynchings as the enactment of preexisting anti-Italian sentiment in Louisiana.⁷

⁵ Additionally, the scholarship of Louisiana race-relations focuses on the changing racial categories of the region, defined by the 1890s in terms of whites, blacks and mixed/mulattos, which does not account for the racial place and impact of Italians and is a theme I focus on in my other work.

⁶ With regards to the 1891 lynching, much has been written; originally begun as an apologia in the 1940s, Italian scholars in the 1970s hypothesized various conspiracy theories in an attempt to uncover the “real” motives behind the lynching and to reclaim Italian-American identity from the imposed Mafia stereotype. Such scholars, including but not limited to Barbara Botein, Lyle Saxon and Tom Smith do readily engage with local sources in their efforts to uncover “who killa da chief (Botein, “The Hennessy Case: An Episode in Anti-Italian Nativism.” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*. 20.3 (Summer, 1979): 261-279; Saxon, *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1945); Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings: The Murder of Chief Hennessy, the New Orleans “Mafia” Trials, and the Parish Prison Mob* (Guilford: Lyons Press, 2007)). However, part of my historiographical qualm, upon which I will elaborate, involves those analyses of the New Orleans lynching that do not use local sources, along with those that consider the lynching evidence of the anti-Italian master narrative.

⁷ My consideration that historians have used a northern perspective as a stand-in for a “national” narrative results from the manner in which the historiography of Italian immigrants has developed. The largest populations of Italians in the United States, especially at the turn-of-the century, resided in northern cities (U.S. Census Bureau; see also “Immigration Explorer,” *The New York Times*, March 10, 2009). Unsurprisingly and because of this, historians began to study Italian immigrants through regional case studies of immigrant communities in these cities, such as New York, Buffalo and Chicago. (For foundational examples, see Donna R Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change among Italian Immigrants, 1880-1930* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community:*

However, just because justification for the lynchings of Italians/Sicilians was rhetorically grounded in the presumed criminality, unassimilability and “undesirability” of Louisiana’s Italian population, does not mean that these lynchings were actually motivated by long-standing anti-Italian sentiment.⁸ Such an established interpretation ignores the regionally and temporally specific trajectory of Italians in Louisiana and takes for granted the common conclusions regarding Italians’ racialization.⁹ By contesting the national narrative that has been uncritically imposed upon what is a specifically Louisiana story and problematizing the common racial characterization of Italians, the experience of Italians in Louisiana may be re-read as a clear case of regional race-making. What happens when analyzing the experience of Italians in Louisiana *before* the lynchings and from a more regional source base?

Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880-1930 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); Rudolph John Vecoli, "Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of *The Uprooted*." *The Journal of American History*. 51.3 (Dec. 1964): 404-417; Humbert S Nelli, *Italians in Chicago, 1880-1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970)). Much of the recent scholarship on Italian immigrants has continued this trend even while offering nuanced interpretations that have revised our understanding of Italian racialization and introduced new narratives such as the radicalism among Italian immigrant women; in large part, however, these new perspectives have still been collected from the experience of Italian immigrants in northern urban areas (See, for example, Thomas A Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Peter G Vellon, *A Great Conspiracy against Our Race: Italian Immigrant Newspapers and the Construction of Whiteness in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: NYU Press, 2014)). From foundational monographs to more recent interventions, historians have culled the master narrative on Italian immigrants in large part from the stories of these immigrants in northern cities. And, because this “northern” narrative remains the prevailing means of explaining the experience of Italians in the United States, the “northern” has been used as a stand-in for “national.” In this chapter, I trouble this slippage as I remain conscious of telling the specifically Louisiana-version of the Italian immigrant story.

⁸ There were six different lynchings of Italians in the United States during the 1890s; half of those lynchings occurred in Louisiana. In this chapter, I have put certain words and phrases in quotation marks without specific references to the primary sources to denote that these phrases or terms were represented across multiple primary sources and thus stand-in for widely used rhetoric and/or sentiment of the time.

⁹ James R. Barrett and David Roediger, “Inbetween Peoples: Race Nationality and the ‘New Immigrant’ Working Class,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1997): 3; Thomas A Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

What is revealed by removing the lynching teleology as the basis for explaining the treatment of Italians in Louisiana in the post-lynching era?

In this chapter, I counter this slippage between local and national by remaining conscious of the specifically Louisiana-version of the Italian immigrant story across a broader historical moment. In so doing, I offer a revised frame that problematizes the application of a standard declension narrative upon the Italian immigrant experience in Louisiana. Through my comparative analysis of press discourse from Louisiana with that of New York and other major cities around the country, as well as a more critical assessment of New Orleans's various newspapers, I focus on the specific experience of Italians in Louisiana across a broader historical moment and describe a different trajectory.¹⁰ I begin with a critical analysis of the historiographical treatment of Italians/Sicilians in Louisiana.¹¹ I then move to a review of northern/national press rhetoric concerning Italians/Sicilians in the 1870s-80s, which I contrast with press discourse from Louisiana regarding Italians/Sicilians from the same era. Unlike the characterization of Italian immigrants in northern cities as unassimilable, undesirable and largely criminal, the experience of Italians in Louisiana was originally characterized by a more positive relationship between native-born New Orleanians and Italian immigrants. I reveal that the underlying significance of this distinction resulted from economic self-interest intent on solving

¹⁰ Specifically, I reviewed the local New Orleanian presses for references to Italian(s), Sicilian(s) and dago(es) between 1870-1900.

¹¹ Historiographically and historically (within press rhetoric and immigration records), the terms Italian and Sicilian were largely used interchangeably; while I utilize this convention to some extent, I attempt to emphasize the fact that the immigrants under consideration here were largely Sicilian, as the vast majority of Italian immigrants in Louisiana, nearly 90%, were in fact Sicilian (Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 44).

the region's post-Civil War labor shortage. As a result, public discourse in Louisiana, at least in the 1870s-80s, encouraged Italian immigration, differentiated between the Italian and the criminal, and identified Italians as valuable and productive "fellow-citizens." I demonstrate that only later, most immediately observable after the 1891 lynching in New Orleans, did Louisiana press discourse begin to fluctuate and to adopt the more virulently anti-Italian rhetoric commonly understood to characterize the Italian immigrant experience at the end of the 19th century.¹²

Finally, I analyze the changing perception of Italians/Sicilians and shifting conceptualizations of their citizenship status in the Gulf South in the post-lynching aftermath. Not only did press discourse begin to utilize a more anti-Italian rhetoric, but the citizenship status of Italians/Sicilians was also in flux. Just as Italian migration was initially encouraged because of the demands for inexpensive plantation labor, economics also motivated efforts on behalf of U.S. state officials to construct Italian lynching victims as American citizens in order to avoid making indemnity payments to the Italian government for the wrongful death of Italian subjects. The contrast between efforts by U.S. state officials to render Italian lynching victims as American citizens and the increasingly virulent anti-Italian press discourse represents the inherent tension between different constituent groups, one with a utilitarian need for Italian immigrants and another that increasingly viewed Italians as competition.¹³ Meanwhile, Italian officials, as part of their own state-making project, utilized these

¹² Just to clarify, the surge in anti-Italian rhetoric was less of a causative factor of the 1891 lynching and served instead as justification for the violence within the post-lynching aftermath.

¹³ This tension between different constituencies is mirrored by the contrast between national anti-Italian rhetoric and the more positive Italian rhetoric in Louisiana in the 1870s/80s.

lynching crises and indemnity debates to claim Sicilians as Italians and enfold them within the Italian state, further highlighting the fact that the way citizenship operated for Italians/Sicilians in the U.S. was inextricably linked to Italy's own nation-building project. Finally, Italian and Sicilian immigrants themselves also participated in the construction of their own citizenship identity. In moments of crisis, like the lynchings of the 1890s where their shared marginalization as "dagoes" became ever apparent despite their imported regional differences, Italians and Sicilians in Louisiana began to reevaluate and realign their civic identity. Demonstrating the emergence of *Italianità*, they bound together in solidarity and further forged trans-regional alliances, just as Sicilians appealed to the privileges of their "ascribed [Italian] nationality." Just as citizenship was in part a racial construction, this offers insight into the transient status of both the civic and racial identity of Italians in the Gulf South.

In an effort to interrogate a reliance on strictly nation-state conceptions of citizenship, I additionally incorporate the processes of "ascribed nationality" and "informal citizenship." This highlights how moments where diplomatic officials constituted national identity, over that of individual identity, and where individuals, navigating the strategies of exclusion and performing their role as citizen, contributed to the co-production of a dynamic civic identity. These categories underscore the fact that citizenship remains a dynamic construction, neither strictly nation-based nor solely culturally or socially constructed, but co-produced in tandem by both "formal" and "informal" mutually constitutive and overlapping forces.

As Jennifer Guglielmo has persuasively argued, the presumed association between Italians and criminality actually originated in Italy, not the United States. As part of a nation-building project by at the end of the nineteenth century, a group of Italian positivist anthropologists, using skull measurements and other forms of “scientific proof,” developed the new field of criminology and identified a scientific difference between northern and southern Italians.¹⁴ These anthropologists concluded that not only were northern Italians “racially distinct” from southern Italians, but southerners additionally possessed “inferior African blood,” which predisposed them to innate criminality.¹⁵

Beyond the construction of a racial hierarchy in Italy, the significance of the criminologists’ project lies in its transnational appeal and the extent to which it informed U.S. perceptions of southern Italians. These theories were widely disseminated across popular as well scholarly media sources and directly influenced

¹⁴ Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women’s Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945*, 83.

¹⁵ Thomas Guglielmo, “No Color Barrier: Italians, Race, and Power in the United States,” in *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America*, ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York: Routledge, 2003), 33). Offering further evidence that Southern Italians were understood as a distinctly and inferior race, Louise DeSalvo reports that rampant starvation in southern Italy, which greatly motivated Italian immigration at the end of the nineteenth century, was actually “imposed” by government officials and was understood as a form of what some scholars might now call “ethnic cleansing” (“Color White/Complexion Dark,” in *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America*, ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York: Routledge, 2003), 19). While this may be going too far to consider the Italian government’s actions in southern Italy as “ethnic cleansing,” there is great evidence to demonstrate the widespread suspicion of authority throughout Italy. At times, poor, southern Italians interpreted certain calamities as a sign of class warfare. For example, the 1884 cholera pandemic in Naples was understood as a poisoning campaign orchestrated by officials to kill off the poor (Frank M Snowden, *Naples in the Time of Cholera, 1884-1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 138). This demonstrates evidence of the great divisions between Northern and Southern Italians, variously articulated in racial terms and eventually appropriated by U.S. legislators across the Atlantic.

U.S. immigration lawmakers.¹⁶ By 1899, the U.S. Immigration Commission had officially identified Southern Italians as a race separate from Northern Italians; they went on to characterize Southern Italians by 1911 as “excitable, impulsive, highly imaginative, impracticable...[with] little adaptability to highly organized society.”¹⁷ As Edward Ross, a U.S. social scientist, eugenics advocate and immigration restrictionist, explained in 1914, while “northern Italians were well-fitted for citizenship, their southern counterparts certainly were not because of their horrifying ‘propensity for personal violent,’ ‘inaptness’ for teamwork, strong dose of African blood, and ‘lack of mental ability.’”¹⁸

In spite of this, as Thomas Guglielmo has persuasively argued, Italians were “white on arrival” and were granted the legal privileges of whiteness from their earliest ingress.¹⁹ Most significantly, and in contrast to Asian immigrants, Italians could naturalize as U.S. citizens. Yet, only a portion of Italians took advantage of these opportunities available to them, as, by 1910, only an estimated twenty-five percent of eligible Italians had naturalized.²⁰ Dubbed “birds of passage” because of

¹⁶ Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945*, 89.

¹⁷ William Paul Dillingham and U.S. Immigration Commission 1907-10, *Dictionary of Races of Peoples* (Washington Government Printing Office, 1911), 83. The Commission went on to conclude, “The Bureau of Immigration places the North Italian in the ‘Keltic’ division and the South Italian in the ‘Iberic.’ Comparatively little admixture has taken place between these two ethnic groups” (Ibid.).

¹⁸ Quoted in Guglielmo, “No Color Barrier: Italians, Race, and Power in the United States,” 23. These stereotypes were further augmented by the historical awareness of life in southern Italy. For example, in the late-nineteenth century, Sicily was reported as having the highest homicide rate in Europe (Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 188). Margavio and Salomone additionally conclude that this experience and familiarity with homicide may have led to the transplantation of certain immigrant sensibilities in Louisiana, such as desensitization to violence and a distrust of the law (*Bread and Respect*, 191).

¹⁹ *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945*.

²⁰ Michael M. Topp, *The Sacco and Vanzetti Case: A Brief History with Documents* (Bedford: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 5. Why did so few Italians settle permanently in the United States and officially adopt American citizenship? Labor historians like Mark Wyman have generally attributed these low rates of naturalization to the common practice of seasonal migration, and have placed greater emphasis upon

their inclination towards seasonal migration, between 1880-1920, an estimated fifty percent of Italian immigrants returned to Italy.²¹ Such habits of seasonal migration contributed to the development of an anti-Italian discourse; motivated in part by economic fears, this national discourse questioned the loyalty of Italians to the United States. The Immigration Investigation Committee of Congress of 1888 found that Italian settlement was only temporary, and that “Italians...come here to make their pile [but] they prefer to spend their money in Italy.”²² Included in the committee’s report was a critical description of the Italian interviewees with “unkempt” hair and “ill-fitting and slouchy” dress. The description criticized the fact that the interviewees could not speak English, could not read or write, and were not familiar with geography; the interviewers also reportedly encountered great difficulty in getting an “answer to the simplest question.”²³ The description’s unsympathetic and disparaging tone demonstrated a great disregard for those who “preferred” Italy over America.

economic, rather than social or legal factors in terms of such transiency (*Round-trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993)). Dino Cinel offered a cultural explanation for seasonal migration (*The National Integration of Italian Return Migration, 1870-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)). Cinel contends that Southern Italians understood their emigration as strictly temporary and never even contemplated permanently settling in the United States. Cinel claims, those who did choose to permanently settle in the U.S. did so because of a failed attempt to return to Italy. Furthermore, because most Italians understood their American sojourn as temporary, they made few overtures to integrate; this contributed to the Italians’ inability to integrate and increased their discriminatory treatment. Thus marked by the host country and themselves, Italians self-identified and were labeled as outsiders

²¹ Wyman, *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930*, 10. Scholars concur, Italians re-migrated at a higher rate than any other immigrant group. Between 1876-1976, an estimated 25.8 million Italians left Italy, but since 1900 only 10 million Italians are believed to have left permanently (Francesco Cordasco, “Bollettino Dell’Emigrazione (1902-1927): A Guide to the Chronicles of Italian Mass Migration,” in *The Columbus People: Perspectives in Italian Immigration to the Americas and Australia*, ed. Lydio F. Tomasi, Piero Gastaldo and Thomas Row (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1994), 499). See also Cinel’s statistical data in Chapter 5 (*The National Integration of Italian Return Migration*). From 1907-1911, 72% of Italians are believed to have returned to Italy (Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 31).

²² “Only Birds of Passage,” *New York Times*, 29 July 1888.

²³ *Ibid.*

While this habit of return migration garnered Italians a certain amount of disdain in the national press, such negative tropes commonly found in national characterizations of Italians were still absent from New Orleans discourse in the 1870s-80s.²⁴ This is in contrast with the established reading of Italians in Louisiana, which explains that “anti-Italian racism exploded” in 1891 New Orleans; yet, much of the documentation historians have used to demonstrate such sentiment derives from sources outside of Louisiana.²⁵ For example, while Gambino accurately associates the New Orleans incident with the development and growth of the Mafia image within public awareness, he claims, “All Italian-Americans were accused either directly or by implication of being somehow responsible [for Hennessy’s murder].”²⁶ Yet, Gambino appears to draw his conclusions solely from *New York Times* editorials in the post-lynching era, just as he illustrates the “extent of the fear of Italian immigrants” with an 1888 article from Buffalo, New York that describes the arrest of “swarthy-looking, jabbering foreigners.”²⁷ Gambino goes on to offer an 1890 article entitled “What Shall We Do with the Dago?” from *Popular Science Monthly*, a New

²⁴ In the course of my research and in order to provide a more direct comparison of the rhetoric before/after the Hennessy affair, I searched the digitized issues of the *Daily Picayune* for references to Italian(s), Sicilian(s) and dago(es) between 1870-1900; I additionally reviewed the hard copies of the entire run of *The Mascot* in search of references to Italians and immigrants, while I also reviewed the hard copies of the *Times Democrat* and *Daily States* for mention of Italian(s), Sicilian(s) and dago(es) in the months before and after the various southern lynchings of Italians in the 1880s-1890s. As available, I also searched for those same terms in local Louisiana newspapers (outside of New Orleans) accessible through the Library of Congress’s *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. To be sure, I did come across certain pejorative references to Italians, which I will subsequently address, however, these negative accountings did not occur with the frequency nor with the racialized rhetoric that was readily found within the northern/national press.

²⁵ Marco Rimanelli and Sheryl L Postman, *The 1891 New Orleans Lynching and U.S.-Italian Relations: A Look Back* (New York: P. Lang, 1992).

²⁶ Gambino, *Vendetta*, 255.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

York-based magazine, as a “typical” description of Italians.²⁸ Likewise, within the primary source documents collected by Salvatore LaGumina in *WOP!*, the vast majority of evidence included in the chapter about the “Maturation of Anti-Italianism 1880-1890” is from the *New York Times*.²⁹ Similarly, when Jacobson suggests that a belief in “Italians *innate* criminality . . . prompted” the New Orleans lynching, he quotes largely from the *New York Times* to substantiate his claim.³⁰ In so doing, he provides persuasive rhetoric: Sicilians were described as “a pest without mitigation;” editorials decried that “our own rattlesnakes are as good citizens as [the Italians]” and requested “a thousand Chinamen [rather] than one Italian.”³¹ Yet, while accurately representing a northern depiction of Italians and providing a New Yorkers’ interpretation of the 1891 lynching, these sources do not accurately capture the perspective and opinions of native-born Louisianans regarding Italian immigrants.³²

Not only have descriptions of the New Orleans lynching from New York-based sources been misappropriated, but historians have similarly misread Louisiana

²⁸ The pejorative epithet “dago” was commonly used in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to refer to Italians. According to explanations of the time, “We owe the word ‘Dago’ to the Spaniard, whose language furnished this slang name for the men of the Mediterranean countries who come to the United States,” (*Daily Picayune*, 20 April 1898) or for “dark-colored Europeans” (*Daily Picayune*, 8 July 1898). The etymology of the term is believed to have thus evolved from the prevalence of confusing Italians with Spanish or Portuguese sailors, who were universally referred to as “Diego,” because “all of those nationalities looked much alike and the general sound of the language they spoke was similar” (*Daily Picayune*, 20 July 1872; *Daily Picayune*, 20 April 1898). Another explanation of the term links the meaning to an abbreviated version of “dagger-wielding,” as a commentary on the Italian propensity for violence (Rimanelli and Postman, *The 1891 New Orleans Lynching and U.S.-Italian Relations: A Look Back*, 60).

²⁹ John LaGumina, *Wop!: A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination in the United States* (Toronto: Guernica, 1999).

³⁰ *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 56-58.

³¹ *Ibid.*; “The New Orleans Affair,” *New York Times*, 16 March 1891; “The Lynching Justifiable,” *New York Times*, 17 March 1891; “Lynch Law and the Mafia,” *New York Times*, 17 March 1891.

³² This is not to say that negative rhetoric regarding Italians was absent from the New Orleans press, but rather and as I will subsequently demonstrate, this only represents a portion of a more complex story.

newspapers. The most glaring of these occurrences appears from Mangione and Morreale in a chapter entitled, “New Orleans—Wops, Crime and Lynchings”:

Caricatures of the immigrants began to appear in the New Orleans newspapers. In *The Mascot*, the Italian immigrant was drawn as a dirty, bearded, hook-nosed man carrying a battered basket filled with bananas. Italian fruit peddlers were pictured with broad thick mouths and hooked noses, cluttering up the walks with their fruit stands. They slept ten to a room in the midst of flight and were seen killing one another with knives. The best way of disposing of them, the next series of drawings suggested, was to drown them in batches, or at least beat them and jail them. In a series of cartoons of October 1890 entitled “The Italian Population,” one panel shows a group of immigrants in a cage being lowered into the river. The caption reads: ‘The Way to Dispose of Them.’³³

Firstly, the above description largely refers to only one set of cartoons printed in only one issue of *The Mascot* on September 7, 1889, pictured on the following page.³⁴ As I will discuss subsequently, while this depiction remains unabashedly anti-Italian, the assertion that caricatures of Italians were common occurrences in New Orleans newspapers lacks substantive textual evidence.

³³ *La Storia*, 201.

³⁴ *The Mascot*, 7 September 1889. This New Orleans’s cartoon has often been used as an example of long-standing anti-Italian sentiment; however, *The Mascot*’s singular anti-Italian depiction challenges the supposition of widespread anti-Italian attitudes in 1880s New Orleans.



The “dirty, bearded, hook-nosed man carrying a battered basket filled with bananas” is from a January 5, 1889 issue of *The Mascot*, but does not actually serve as a critique of Italians as a group or Italian immigration in general; rather, this caricature was intended, as explained by the accompanying editorial, to criticize Governor Nicholls for appointing an undeserving Italian to the position of “Inspector of Weights and Measures for the First District.”

Secondly, Mangione and Morreale, along with Clive Webb, cite *The Mascot* as evidence of “popular prejudice” against Italians and Sicilians, yet they fail to

problematize their very source material.³⁵ *The Mascot* was a weekly scandal sheet that regularly ridiculed all groups in New Orleans, immigrants, prominent citizens, politicians and law-enforcement officers alike; no one was safe from *The Mascot*'s mockery, gossip and political muckraking.³⁶ Additionally, and in contrast to other local papers, *The Mascot* was the only paper in New Orleans to print a scathing critique of the lynch mob in the days following the 1891 attack; although intended to disparage the strike leaders, the front-page story also served to sympathize with the lynching victims. Additionally, although Mangione and Morreale claim that "the 'dagos' did not fare well in the local papers, which called them 'dirty, lazy, ignorant and prone to violence,'" this quote appears in the same September 1889 issue of *The Mascot*, thus again, neither characteristic nor all-encompassing of 1880s New Orleanian rhetoric.³⁷ Therefore, *The Mascot*'s singular disparaging depiction of Italians in 1889 cannot be considered as representative of widespread or common anti-Italian sentiment in 1880s Louisiana.³⁸

³⁵ *La Storia*, Chapter 13; Clive Webb, "The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886-1910," in *Lynching Reconsidered: New Perspectives in the Study of Mob Violence*, ed. William D. Carrigan (New York: Routledge, 2008), 175-204.

³⁶ Historian Sally Asher is currently working on a project about the undocumented history of *The Mascot*.

³⁷ *La Storia*, 203.

³⁸ My intention here is not to discount *The Mascot* as unreliable or insignificant, but based on their history of contrarian reporting as well as their circulation numbers, *The Mascot* was not necessarily representative of New Orleans press discourse. For example, 1887 self-reported and estimated circulation numbers place *The Mascot* weekly distribution at 4,000-5000, while the *Daily Picayune* distributed 10,000-12,500 issues daily (at least 70,000-87,500 weekly) and the *Times Democrat* distributed 15,000-17,500 issues daily (at least 105,000-122,500 weekly) (*American Newspaper Directory*, 19th ed. (New York: Geo. P. Rowell & Company, 1887)).



Pictured to the left, *The Mascot* does offer a marked critique of increased immigration in an April 13, 1889 issue; however, the specific immigrant group caricatured and targeted on the front page was explained as “Austrian gypsies.”

The article goes on to admit, “Honest and industrious foreigners are always welcome and always will be, for they and their descendants make useful and respectable citizens and improve the condition of the community. We don’t want the paupers.”³⁹ Thus, despite certain moments and occasional misgivings, anti-Italian sentiment was

³⁹ *The Mascot* 13 April 1889. While *The Mascot* made a markedly anti-immigrant appeal in this issue, the accompanying article focused its critique on “Austrian gypsies” and suggested that “honest and industrious foreigners” were welcome in New Orleans. Unlike the “Austrian gypsies,” Louisianans considered Italians the more desirable brand of immigrants, as other discussions of immigrants within the New Orleans press, and on which I will subsequently elaborate, specified Italians as “earnest,” “worthy...highly esteemed,” and “proper citizens” (“Italian Immigrants,” *Daily Picayune*, 27 October 1890; Our Italian Fellow-Citizens,” *Daily Picayune*, 4 March 1889; “The Italian-American Citizens Falling into Line,” *Daily Picayune*, 29 September 1887).

far from ubiquitous in the New Orleans press in the decades leading up to the 1891 lynching.⁴⁰

Discourse on Italians: National/Northern Press

This was, however, in direct contrast to press rhetoric within the national press; as elucidated by numerous scholars and confirmed by my own reading of the primary evidence, negative stereotypes of Italians dominated press discourse (outside of Louisiana) well before the lynchings.⁴¹ As early as the 1870s, the New York press described arriving Italian-immigrants as “ignorant and uneducated” “brigands from Southern Italy” who “belong to the criminal classes.”⁴² *The New York Times*

⁴⁰ The articles cited from *The Mascot* thus far do not represent the only disparaging depictions of Italians in the New Orleans or Louisiana press, as I will provide and analyze additional examples later in this paper.

⁴¹ In order to present the “national” discourse, I provide comprehensive evidence from the *New York Times*, the nation’s paper of record. I also cite from the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, *New York Sun*, *New York Evening World*, as well as *Washington D.C.’s National Republican* and *National Tribune*. I include San Francisco and Los Angeles as additional evidence because, although both represented decidedly regional/western perspectives, they also reprinted various news stories from northern cities like New York, thus replicating a “northern” perspective across the nation.

⁴² “The Poor Italians,” *New York Times*, Dec., 15, 1872; “Italian Immigration,” *New York Times*, Dec., 17, 1872; “The Italians,” *New York Times*, Dec., 11, 1872; “The Homeless Italians,” *New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1872; “The Suffering Italians,” *New York Times*, Dec. 14, 1872. As an important side note, Northern newspaper accountings of Italians were not categorically hostile. Within the *New York Times* in the 1870s, much reporting on Italians was devoted to critiquing the occurrence of forced labor and the alleged “trafficking of Italian children” (“Italian Slaves,” *New York Times*, 6 January 1871; “White Slavery Traffic in Children,” *New York Times*, 12 June 1873; “The Italian Slaves: Arrest of a Padroni,” *New York Times*, 22 July 1873). While the *Times* critically reported on Italian crime, another subset of articles, describing Italian celebrations and festivals, utilized an entirely neutral tone (An Italian Assassinated,” *New York Times*, 14 March 1875; “Felony Assault by Italians,” *New York Times*, 12 August 1876; “A Fatal Stabbing Affray: An Italian Killed By his Companion, Result of a Quarrel Over a Game of Cards,” *New York Times*, 5 December 1879; “Italian Demonstrations: Proposed Celebration of Italian Unity,” *New York Times*, 30 July 1871; “Italian Movements: Meeting of the Italian Benevolent Society,” *New York Times*, 14 August 1871; “Italian Festivities,” *New York Times*, 2 June 1874; “Eight Hundred Italians Vaccinated,” *New York Times*, 4 May 1874). An additional perspective included a sympathetic tone directed at the “poor Italian” immigrants, with even the periodic positive assessment of these arrivals; of note, such positive notations were usually in conjunction with differentiating between previous immigrants made up of “industrious and honest people from Genoa and the towns of the Ligurian coast” and newer immigrants from south Italy “who are now so frequently guilty of crimes of violence...extremely ignorant...[and] miserably poor” (“Our Italians,” *New York Times*, 12 November 1875; “The Poor Italians,” *New York Times*, 15 December 1872; “Suffering Among the Poor Italians,” *New York Times*, 16 December 1873; “The Homeless Italians,” *New York Times*, 13 December 1872;

considered Italian-immigrants as “starving and wholly destitute,” “wretchedly poor and unskilled,” “professional beggars” and “a very degraded and ignorant population;” Italian children “were utterly unfit—ragged, filthy, and verminous as they were—to be placed in the public primary schools among the decent children of American mechanics.”⁴³ In the 1880s, sanitary officers pronounced foreign-born Italians who resided in “squalid huts or noisome cellars” as “links in a descending chain of evolution.”⁴⁴ Sentiment from New York to Washington DC to Chicago to San Francisco marked the arriving Italian immigrants as the “filthy, wretched, lazy, ignorant, and criminal dregs of the meanest sections of Italy.”⁴⁵ According to the *National Tribune*, Italians were “ignorant scum,” while the *San Francisco Chronicle* asserted that Italians contributed to the “deteriorating” state of immigration.⁴⁶ Press discourse in Chicago warned that Italians did not make good citizens, because they posed a “severe tax upon the assimilative powers of the Nation” and that Italians were a “curse to themselves [and] a burden upon charity” who lived in “squalor and filth”

“The Suffering Italians,” *New York Times*, 14 December 1872). Again, while the occasional article spoke of the positive impact of the “Italianization of New York,” other reports paternalistically assessed the new arrivals: “It is, perhaps, hopeless to think of civilizing them, or of keeping them in order, except by the arm of the law” (“Naples in New York,” *New York Times*, 4 January 1873; “Our Italians,” *New York Times*, 12 November 1875). This is all to say that, in contrast with the subsequent examples, there were certainly sympathetic assessments of Italian immigrants within northern newspapers, yet, generally, northern press accounts of Italian immigrants included a different focus and perspective than the southern press.

⁴³ “The Italians,” *New York Times*, 11 December 1872; “The Homeless Italians,” *New York Times*, 13 December 1872; “The Suffering Italians,” *New York Times*, 14 December 1872; “The Poor Italians,” *New York Times*, 15 December 1872; “Italian Immigration,” *New York Times*, 17 December 1872; “Our Future Citizens,” *New York Times*, 5 March 1882; “Italian Degeneracy,” *New York Times*, 17 April 1885.

⁴⁴ “Compulsory Cleanliness,” *New York Times*, 11 July 1880. A common trope described Italians as an invading parasite: They were “locusts,” “vile and filthy beyond description,” “living like dogs” and bringing with them “contamination [and] pollution” (*National Tribune*, 2 August 1888 (Washington D.C.); *Los Angeles Times*, 9 July 1888 (Los Angeles, CA)). Similarly, Italian immigration put the United States in danger: “The body politic is threatened with dyspepsia from overloading and overtaxing the digestive organs” (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 July 1887 (Chicago, IL)).

⁴⁵ “Undesirable Immigrants,” *New York Times*, 18 December 1880.

⁴⁶ *National Tribune*, 2 August 1888 (Washington D.C.); *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2 May 1890 (San Francisco, CA).

and “contribut[ed] their quota to the filth, vice and wretchedness.”⁴⁷ Both the *Chicago Tribune* and the *New York Tribune* explained that the “evils of Italian immigration” were rooted in the understood impossibility of turning “hordes of ignorant paupers into intelligent, self-sustaining citizens.”⁴⁸

Communities around the country identified Italians as the most undesirable of all immigrant groups and went on to suggest that the U.S. should increase its immigration restrictions, on par with Chinese Exclusion. For example, the Washington DC *National Tribune* proclaimed, “We did well when we prohibited Chinese immigration. We should go farther, and at once, and put an effectual stop to our country being made the dumping-ground for the ignorance, filth and the vice of Europe.”⁴⁹ The *Los Angeles Times* highlighted the desirability of German immigrants, in contrast to Italians, because “Germans come to America to become America,” and unlike Italians, they renounce their allegiances to their native lands and learn English.⁵⁰ Additionally, another common trope described Italians as an invading parasite: They were “locusts,” “vile and filthy beyond description,” “living like dogs” and bringing with them “contamination [and] pollution.”⁵¹ Such Italian immigration, the national press reported, put the United States in danger: “The body politic is threatened with dyspepsia from overloading and overtaxing the digestive organs.”⁵²

⁴⁷ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 July 1887; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 July 1888; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 July 1888.

⁴⁸ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 July 1888 and 23 July 1888; *New York Tribune*, 5 August 1888.

⁴⁹ *National Tribune*, 2 August 1888. Similar sentiment was also expressed in *New York Sun*, 28 November 1887.

⁵⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, 10 August 1887.

⁵¹ *National Tribune*, 2 August 1888 (Washington D.C.); *Los Angeles Times*, 9 July 1888.

⁵² *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 July 1887.

While some of this discourse included a paternalistic tone that described the need to help, protect, aid and “improve [the Italian] condition,” given the reoccurring narrative, the public appeared to believe the rumors that arriving Italians had been purposefully sent to the U.S. by the Italian government “to get rid of them.”⁵³ According to the *New York Evening World*, the Italian government “secretly stimulated emigration because the immigrants, if at all prosperous in this Republic, send back their savings to their native land.”⁵⁴ The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that as a result of overcrowding, the Italian government was sending their “paupers” to America.⁵⁵ Such perspectives around the country feared this influx to be economically unsustainable and physically dangerous, since Italians represented a population of “paupers” who “depress wages,” and went as far as suggesting that

We can no longer afford to overlook the evil of promiscuous immigration...[Italians] are not a class of immigrants whom we can receive without danger to ourselves. In clannishness and persistent adherence to the speech, dress and mode of life of their own country the Italian and the Chinese immigrant are on a par, though the much-abused wearers of the pigtail are more cleanly in their domestic habits. But the Chinaman very rarely gives the Police or the courts any trouble, while it is notorious that no foreigners with whom we have to deal, stab and murder on so slight provocations as the Italians.⁵⁶

Italians’ unassimilable tendencies marked them as foreign, on par with other racialized immigrant groups like the Chinese. What set the Italian even further apart

⁵³ “The Poor Italians,” *New York Times*, Dec., 15, 1872; “Italian Immigration,” *New York Times*, Dec., 17, 1872; “The Italians,” *New York Times*, Dec., 11, 1872; “The Homeless Italians,” *New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1872; “The Suffering Italians,” *New York Times*, Dec. 14, 1872.

⁵⁴ 2 August 1888.

⁵⁵ 12 August 1888.

⁵⁶ As explained by the Knights of Labor in the *National Republican*, 3 March 1884 (Washington D.C.); *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 July 1888; *New York Sun*, 28 October 1888; “Undesirable Immigrants,” *New York Times*, 18 December 1880.

was the persistent stereotype within the national discourse that identified Italians as predisposed to violence and criminal activity.

Discourse on Italians: Louisiana Press

However, public perception in 1880s Louisiana challenged the archetypal and national stereotypes of Italians. Instead, the Louisiana press conveyed a contrasting and relatively sanguine response to the practice of return migration.⁵⁷ One article entitled, “Homeward Bound: Members of the Italian Colony Going Back with their Savings,” described the departure of an Italy-bound ship transporting Italians who had resided in Louisiana for several years and had “earned enough money to enable them to return and spend the remainder of their lives in their native land, sunny Italy.”⁵⁸ Unlike the national commentary, the tone of this regional response evoked neither contempt for this eastward flow of U.S. currency, nor disdain for Italians who resided only “temporarily” in Louisiana before ultimately returning “home.”⁵⁹ To be certain, this more positive assessment may have been motivated by the economic need for

⁵⁷ This example, along with subsequent quotations in the section, comes specifically from the New Orleans press. Press discourse may have been less open and hospitable within in the rural sugar parishes, where the Italians’ Catholicism, for example, would have been seen as more foreign than in New Orleans. Yet rural press rhetoric was still absent of blatant anti-Italian hostility since their labor was still in such demand.

⁵⁸ *Daily Picayune*, 21 January 1890.

⁵⁹ Meanwhile, national discourse progressively focused on return migration as economically “objectionable”: “[Italians] come here in Summer, when public works are undertaken, and return for the Winter, often with a good sum of money. There are districts in Italy recognizable for what is regarded locally as wealth, derived from wages earned here and spent there” (“Birds of Passage,” *New York Times*, 9 March 1906). Henry Cabot Lodge, a restrictionist senator of the 1890s, regularly spoke out against the dangers of the hurtful and undesirable “birds of passage,” who take money they have earned in the United States back to their home countries. “Persons who come to the United States, reduce the rate of wages by ruinous competition, and then take their savings out of the country, are not desirable. They are mere birds of passage. They form an element in the population, which regards as home a foreign country, instead of that in which they live and earn money. They have no interest or stake in the country, and they never become American citizens” (Henry Cabot Lodge, “Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration,” *North American Review* 152, no. 414 (May 1891): 608–09). Part of the anti-seasonal migration discourse was grounded in an economic argument, while another aspect questioned Italian loyalty to the United States.

cheap labor along with a social disinterest in more permanently integrating foreigners. However, the tone remains markedly different from northern press assessments of the same seasonal migration phenomenon.

In general, New Orleans newspapers described Italians as fitting in, contributing to the “prosperity of the city and state,” “falling in line,” behaving like “proper citizens,” and being an “industrious, honest and peaceable” people.⁶⁰ New Orleanians went as far as acknowledging the obligation they owed to Italians for the “phenomenal growth” and “Italian enterprise and capital” that had stimulated the region’s economy.⁶¹ As the *Daily Picayune*, one of the main newspapers in New Orleans, went on to report, the “Italian population of this city is quite fifteen thousand, embracing among the number many prominent professional and business men and tradesmen of all sorts, representing a very large aggregate of wealth. Many of them are American citizens, but they still preserve a strong attachment to their native land and cherish a warm admiration for its king.”⁶² Noticeably absent from this commentary was any sort of demand for Italians to “assimilate” or “Americanize,” because, the Italians were considered “an industrious and thrifty people [who] make up an important and picturesque element of our city’s life.”⁶³ Instead, not only did native-born New Orleanians appear to respect the Italians’ cultural ties with Italy, but

⁶⁰ “The Italian-American Citizens Falling into Line,” *Daily Picayune*, 29 September 1887; “Our Italian Fellow-Citizens,” *Daily Picayune*, March 4, 1889.

⁶¹ *Daily Picayune*, 12 November 1890. Specifically New Orleanians credited Italians with having “developed the fruit business to the point where the importation of fruits took on economic significance for the [New Orleans] port” (George E. Cunningham, “The Italian, a Hindrance to White Solidarity in Louisiana, 1890-1898,” *Journal of Negro History* 50.1 [January 1965]: 24).

⁶² “The Italian Colony and Celebration,” *Daily Picayune*, 14 October 1888; the description continues, “They maintain many benevolent associations among themselves and make provision for the indigent of their race.”

⁶³ “The Italian Colony and Celebration,” *Daily Picayune*, 14 October 1888.

encouraged and welcomed their immigration and invited them to naturalize as American citizens.⁶⁴

In direct opposition to the national discourse, opinions within the regional press around the state of Louisiana advocated the “advantages of an influx of immigrants” and explained, “We have room for immigrants, who will meet with a cordial reception and find a genial climate.”⁶⁵ These advocates argued that increased immigration would lead to “prosperity, wealth and refinement” for Louisiana, and that “the future prosperity of our State depends to a great extent upon immigration.”⁶⁶ The *Louisiana Democrat* advocated, “open[ing] the doors of Louisiana wide to the best class of industrious immigrants,” while the *Weekly Messenger* urged the organization of a society to advertise their region and to encourage immigration.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ This promotion of immigration should by no means be misconstrued as unqualified altruism; economic self-interest undoubtedly influenced this more welcoming public discourse, a point on which I will subsequently elaborate.

⁶⁵ *Richland Beacon*, 25 June 1881. (Rayville, LA) The *Richland Beacon* was a staunchly Democrat paper from Northeast Louisiana focused on topics of agriculture and immigration. Of note, recruiters initially targeted Chinese workers, who were considered “good but unreliable workers.” Southern planters soon turned their attention to the recruitment of European immigrant labor, to which the Sicilians responded in the greatest numbers. Italians were also credited with expanding the fruit industry and profit in New Orleans (Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 36). As late as 1905, while dominant national opinions encouraged immigration restriction, southerners expressed the unique regional necessities of the South. For example, M.V. Richards, of the Land and Industrial Agent of the Southern Railway, reported, “There is abundant room for many thousand Italian families on Southern farms and in Southern mills. We have today applications from not only farmers, but manufacturers as well, for Italian laborers” (“The South and Immigration,” *New York Times*, 9 July 1905). As a result, the *New York Times* concluded that the Italians could not be necessarily be considered “undesirable,” if their labor was in-fact desired in the South. In a later report on a southern conference meeting to discuss immigration and quarantine, the *Times* did note an increased desire from Southerners to restrict immigration after the recent outbreak of yellow fever, which was reportedly caused by Italians. However, the *Times* still remarked, “The Southern sentiment at the present time is adverse to immigration of all except those who can be relied on to become tillers of the soil.” They went on to editorialize, “Frankly, we do not think that the best interests of the South will be served nearly as much by greater restriction of general immigration as by some rational system for the encouragement of the best immigration and for directing it where it is most needed” (“Right Immigration to the South,” *New York Times*, 18 October 1905).

⁶⁶ *Richland Beacon*, 26 June 1880. (Rayville, LA)

⁶⁷ *Louisiana Democrat*, 14 September 1881, an anti-Radical Reconstruction paper out of the cotton and timber parish of Alexandria in central Louisiana; *Weekly Messenger*, 17 March 1888, 24 March 1888, 4 August 1888, the local paper for St. Martinville in South Central Louisiana.

They reported that “immigration is the present need of our parish,” since “thousands of acres of the most fertile land of the state is idle, anxiously waiting for the tiller’s plow to break its surface, and yield luxuriant and abundant crops of all kind.”⁶⁸ In stark contrast to attitudes towards immigrants found in most northern cities, advocates across Louisiana specifically encouraged immigration as a result of the unique labor demands of the region.

New Orleanians were already aware of the existence of the Mafia and understood that this criminal element resulted from the “influx of foreigners,” but they specifically advocated that possible criminality should not impede Italian immigration.⁶⁹ Rather than discouraging further immigration or advocating increased immigration restrictions, as did the national press, in a description of an arriving ship of Italian immigrants, the New Orleans press used the opportunity to speak out against an impending head tax that would require immigrants to pay a security of 60,000 francs and effectively reduce the numbers of Italians who could immigrate: “Italians ought to be allowed to better themselves by emigrating if so desired.”⁷⁰ In another report, though the arriving immigrants were pastorally described as bringing “boxes of ugly, ill-smelling cheeses” and perceived as not being “over-intelligent,” they were also considered “earnest,” “strong” and “enduring.”⁷¹ Similarly, the *Times Democrat* published several sketches (pictured on the following page) along with an article entitled “From Sunny Italy, Arrival of a Shipload of Immigrants” that depicted

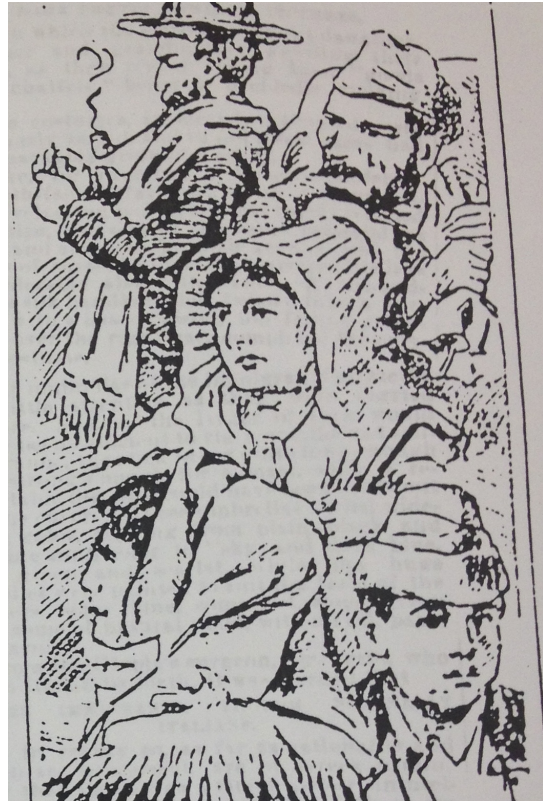
⁶⁸ *Weekly Messenger*, 17 March 1888, 24 March 1888, 4 August 1888. (St. Martinville, LA)

⁶⁹ “Gotham Gossip,” *Daily Picayune*, 27 October 1888.

⁷⁰ “Italian Immigrants,” *Daily Picayune*, 27 December 1888.

⁷¹ “Italian Immigrants,” *Daily Picayune*, 27 October 1890.

un-caricatured versions of Italian immigrants.⁷² One image in particular portrayed an Italian, in culturally-specific attire, bearing a heavy-load.⁷³ Such representations spoke to the perception of Italians as hard-working and economically necessary laborers in Louisiana. This “friendly” depiction, which could be interpreted as a public relations campaign intent on welcoming the much-needed immigrant labor to Louisiana, was a perspective nonetheless consistently held across the New Orleans mainstream press.⁷⁴



This is not to say that the Louisiana press wrote in an unequivocal and universally positive manner about Italians and Sicilians nor that the article previously addressed from *The Mascot* was the sole pejorative representation of Italians and Sicilians in Louisiana newspapers during the 1870s-80s. In fact, Louisiana newspapers readily acknowledged and participated in perpetuating assumptions regarding the violent tendencies of Italians, as evidenced by their regular

⁷² “From Sunny Italy, Arrival of a Shipload of Immigrants,” *Times Democrat*, 18 October 1888. Although the Italians depicted in this image are represented in culturally specific attire, the traditional ethnic caricatures (common in representations of Italian immigrants in the American press outside of Louisiana) are notably absent.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

reports on the Italian or Sicilian “vendetta” and “blood vengeance,” along with their occasional descriptions of “the dark dago who creeps stealthily down a black alley and buries his stiletto in the bosom of an enemy, is dark and bad all the way through.”⁷⁵

Yet these types of deleterious descriptions (and press rhetoric in Louisiana about Italians and Sicilians in general) differ from similarly critical renderings of Italians and Sicilians within the northern or national press. First, such mention of the “dark dago” who is “bad all the way through” remain few and far between in the Louisiana press; in my review of Louisiana newspapers in the 1870s-80s, I found categorically few of these types of negative descriptions.⁷⁶ Second, critical mentions of Italians and Sicilians, even those cited from *The Mascot* earlier in this article, do not racialize Italians and Sicilians in the same manner as northern press rhetoric. Rather, while northern/national rhetoric regularly likened Italians to parasitical “scum,” vermin or “pests,” characterizations of Italians and Sicilians in the Louisiana press were not on par with this type of animalistic language.⁷⁷ I ultimately found few

⁷⁵ *Daily Picayune*, 4 November 1888. Another example of this similar tone can be found in an article reprinted in the *Daily Picayune* from the New York-based *Ladies Home Journal*: “The native Sicilian who does not care if he does get a little of the juice smeared upon his countenance, takes his long, sharp knife—every Sicilian carries a long, sharp knife for family purposed, as he generally has a vendetta or two on hand” (“How to Eat an Orange,” *Daily Picayune*, 24 February 1890). For other examples of the “vendetta” or “blood vengeance,” see “The Blood Vengeance. A Sicilian Vendetta,” *Daily Picayune*, 23 October 1873; “The Vendetta,” *Daily Picayune*, 23 May 1874; “More Murder,” *Daily Picayune*, 14 July 1874; “Is it a Vendetta? A Shooting Affray Down Town,” *Daily Picayune*, 20 April 1878; “The Vendetta,” *Daily Picayune*, 16 July 1881; “Homicide at French Market,” *Daily Picayune*, 1 November 1884.

⁷⁶ While impossible to comprehensively quantify, given the breadth of the historical press, besides those articles that made reference to the violent tendencies of Italians (as those examples cited above), I only came across two articles in the 1880s New Orleans press that employed a distinctively pejorative assessment of Italians (*Daily Picayune*, 4 November 1888; *The Mascot*, 7 September 1889).

⁷⁷ *New York Tribune*, 5 August 1888, *National Tribune*, 2 August 1888; *New York Times*, 16 March 1891. There remains a long history of invoking animalistic imagery to describe African Americans, which served to both dehumanize and racialize them; this pattern then of using similar language to describe Italians serves to comparably render them as uncivilized or inhuman.

efforts in the Louisiana press to apply negative “racial” characteristics to Italians and Sicilians as a group.

Third, even when the press reported on “Italian-on-Italian” violence, such as the Sicilian husband whose neck was found slit and body half burned by “his wife and her paramour” in 1889, these same articles generally differentiated between the Italian community at large and the criminal element.⁷⁸ For example, while the “Sicilian vendetta” was described as “deplorable,” Sicilians were still “frugal, industrious and hard-working.”⁷⁹ Despite the propensity of the “dago population” to engage in “blood vengeance,” the “dagoes” were still a “respectable and hard working class of citizens.”⁸⁰ On occasion, the press even wrote favorably about the violent habits of Italians and Sicilians: “We see the superior advantage of resorting to ancient and summary methods of assassination and the eminent wisdom of the Sicilian gentleman who considered it infinitely ‘safer’ than the chances of a duel.”⁸¹

Additionally, when such “Italian-on-Italian” crimes did headline the local newspapers, the Italian community often spoke out and held mass meetings to denounce such crimes and to protect “the good name” of the “Italian colony in this city.”⁸² The New Orleans press recognized this effort and in response noted that “the Italian colony embraces some of the most worthy, respectable and highly esteemed citizens of New Orleans,” therefore, it would be “a gross injustice to cast reflections

⁷⁸ “Italian Murder,” *Daily Picayune*, 28 February 1889; “Our Italian Fellow-Citizens,” *Daily Picayune*, 4 March 1889.

⁷⁹ “The Vendetta,” *Daily Picayune*, 23 May 1874.

⁸⁰ “The Blood Vengeance. A Sicilian Vendetta,” *Daily Picayune*, 23 October 1873. I will address momentarily the significance of referring to “dagoes” as “respectable citizens” in the same sentence and article.

⁸¹ “Assassination as a Lost Art,” *Daily Picayune*, 9 December 1884.

⁸² “Our Italian Fellow-Citizens,” *Daily Picayune*, 4 March 1889.

on their good name for the crimes of a few of their race.”⁸³ The “evil-doers” in this case were not Italians, but instead, those who failed to differentiate between the Italian community and the criminals who happened to also be Italian.⁸⁴

Finally, the New Orleans and Louisiana press utilized the very term “dago,” generally understood as a derogatory slur or moniker, in a less charged, less racially disparaging, more neutral manner. As evidenced by the above description of the “dago population,” as well as countless references to “Dago Joe,” “Dago Dave,” “dago fishermen,” and “dago sailors,” Louisiana newspapers regularly used “dago” interchangeably with the categories of Italian and Sicilian.⁸⁵ The context of these references provides evidence for the fact that “dago” was a means of racially describing or identifying, not necessarily racially slandering, at least in Louisiana in the 1870s-80s. Even in those cases where “dago” was used in connection with a negative description of an Italian, such as the *Daily Picayune*’s description of “dago hucksters” who were noted as “reeking with odors of every vile description,” this particular portrayal refers to a specific area in New Orleans and to two specific individuals, rather than the Italian “race” as a whole.⁸⁶ Offering further evidence of “dago” as a neutral term, even positive renderings of Italians and their contributions

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ On 1 August 1889, an Italian was reportedly charged with raping a ten year-old “colored girl” (*Daily Picayune*, 1 August 1889). Although “whiteness” was not a prerequisite for legally accessing the court system, prosecution of such crimes would have been erratic (Ariela Gross, *What Blood Won’t Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008)). It is unclear whether this crime would have been similarly prosecuted if a “white” man, rather than an Italian, had committed the crime.

⁸⁵ For a few of the countless examples of this, see “The City,” *Daily Picayune*, 1 February 1872; “The Knife,” *Daily Picayune*, 31 March 1873; “Homicidal,” *Daily Picayune*, 9 June 1874; “Deadly Issues,” *Daily Picayune*, 30 July, 1875; “Our Picayunes,” *Daily Picayune*, 11 August 1884; “Reward for Dago Pete,” *Daily Advocate*, 15 September 1884.

⁸⁶ “Levee Dens,” *Daily Picayune*, 20 January 1874.

utilized “dago” as a identifying synonym for the category of Italian: “In fact, the red-snapper, the principal of our large fish, could not be brought to market at all if it had not been for a valuable discovery made by a Dago some twenty years ago.”⁸⁷

“Dagoes” were even written about sympathetically, such as the “young Dago” who was robbed and “cruelly” beaten by a “crowd of negro baseball players.”⁸⁸ At least within Louisiana press rhetoric, Italians, Sicilians and even “dagoes” occupied a relatively unthreatening place in Louisiana’s social landscape in the 1870s-80s.

New Orleans’s uniquely tolerant discourse may be explained by the specific economic needs of Louisiana and settlement patterns of Italians within the region. Evidence suggests that the Italian community in New Orleans was established well before the Civil War, as the first Italian benevolent society, Societa Mutua Benevolenza Italiana, was established in the city in 1846. In the wake of emancipation, plantation owners were in great need of agricultural labor, which they considered necessary to the economic growth of the region.⁸⁹ As a result, Italian workers, especially Sicilians, were successfully recruited to replace slave labor on the sugarcane, strawberry and cotton plantations. As Italians settled in the sugar parishes of south and south-central Louisiana, largely and disproportionately rural, Italian settlement patterns in Louisiana defined national trends. By 1900, Italian settlement had shifted to more urban areas like New Orleans; however, unlike the situation in

⁸⁷ “The Fish Question,” *Daily Picayune*, 16 June 1874.

⁸⁸ *Daily Advocate*, 16 April 1886.

⁸⁹ Initially, recruiters targeted Chinese workers, considered “good but unreliable workers,” to replace slave labor on the sugarcane plantations (Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 36). Southern planters soon turned their attention to the recruitment of European immigrant labor, to which the Sicilians responded in the greatest numbers.

northern cities, there were no large-scale tenement constructions and Italians settled in fairly decentralized and dispersed patterns.⁹⁰ Additionally, Italians in New Orleans were not ethnically segregated; although they settled primarily around the French Market, subsequently dubbed “Little Palermo,” they established ties and relationships with various parts of the community.⁹¹ Such settlement patterns actually facilitated integration, since Italians were forced in this regard to communicate and interact with non-Italians more regularly—compelled to learn English and adopt non-Italian customs, scholars contend that Italians in New Orleans acculturated with greater immediacy than they would have had they been isolated in an “Italian ghetto.”⁹²

Demographic patterns of Italian immigrants in Louisiana also diverged from those in northern cities. While Sicilians generally made up twenty-five percent of Italian arrivals at the national level, ninety percent of Italian immigrants in New Orleans were Sicilian, resulting from the existing citrus trade between New Orleans

⁹⁰ Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 116. Certainly, as shown by the work of Kathleen Conzen and Mary Ting Li Lui, the northern ethnic ghetto was more a part of the imaginary, since ethnic neighborhoods were not closed off spaces of ethnic separation. While the interethnic mixing may have been more pronounced in a city like New Orleans, it still existed in the urban north as well (Kathleen Neils Conzen, “Immigrants, Immigrant Neighborhoods, and Ethnic Identity: Historical Issues,” *The Journal of American History* 66, no. 3 (1979): 603–15; Mary Ting Li Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁹¹ As early as the 1830s, the “upper city” of New Orleans developed as the Anglicized part of the city, which eventually included the “American Quarter,” while the “lower city,” especially the Faubourg Tremé, became dominated by the Creole and free persons of color community and culture (Richard Campanella, “An Ethnic Geography of New Orleans,” *Journal of American History* 94, no. 3 (2007), 705). Immigrants to New Orleans settled primarily in the lower city; while their settlement patterns did not develop as strict ethnic enclaves, ethnic focal points did arise: the lower French Quarter was known as Little Palermo, Faubourg Marigny was dubbed Little Saxony, Chinatown extended along Tulane Ave., the Poydras and Dryades Street Markets were home to the Orthodox Jewish vendors from Russia and Poland, and the riverfront was called the Irish Channel (Ibid., 708-9).

⁹² Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 116. See also Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, Chapter 3 and Salvatore John LaGumina, *Wop!: A Documentary History of Anti-Italian Discrimination in the United States* (Toronto, 1999), chapter 4.

and Palermo, Sicily.⁹³ Additionally, the Gulf South had a similar geography and climate to Sicily, which contributed to the ability of Sicilians to acclimatize more easily. Also, Italian immigration to New Orleans peaked well before the national apex; half of all Italian immigrants to New Orleans had arrived before 1900.⁹⁴ This may have amplified the sense of *campanilismo* among the Italian immigrants in Louisiana, but it would have also minimized regional differences and influenced the formation of a more cohesive Italian community. Further influencing their ability to successfully integrate, Italians were culturally and religiously similar to the established Creole community; as Catholics who practiced culturally Mediterranean traditions, Italians in New Orleans were not discriminated against because of their religion, nor were they considered especially foreign by the French Creole element.⁹⁵ This directly contrasts with the experience of Italians elsewhere in the more rural Gulf South and northern, largely Protestant cities, where one of the central factors of anti-Italian sentiment was their Catholicism.

This is not to oversimplify the experience of Italians in Louisiana in the 1880s, as some anxieties certainly developed with regards to the settlement pattern of Italians in Louisiana. Vincenza Scarpaci cites the abundance of Italian-owned businesses in rural communities as a sure sign of Italian economic mobility.⁹⁶ Such economic advancement may have triggered a certain amount of apprehension about

⁹³ Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 44.

⁹⁴ Nationally, Italian immigration was at it highest from 1901-1914 (Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, 44).

⁹⁵ Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*, chapter 3; LaGumina, *Wop!*, Chapter 4.

⁹⁶ "Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-1910," in *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America*, ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York: Routledge, 2003), 70.

Italians upward mobility, however, Scarpaci also notes the significant number of “colored saloon licenses” held by Italians in Louisiana’s sugar parishes.⁹⁷ In fact, Scarpaci explains that Italians specifically “targeted” their establishments and enterprises at African American customers for two reasons: Firstly, opening an establishment in a “colored” neighborhood allowed Italians an available and untapped market, and secondly, native-born whites business owners would have found such ventures less directly threatening to their own commercial pursuits.⁹⁸ Because Italian businesses were often located in African American neighborhoods, their economic advancement was not viewed, at least in its early stages, as direct competition to native-born interests.⁹⁹

Since the relationship between Italians and African Americans was not particularly “hostile,” scholars suggest that Italians engaged with the African American community in a manner that challenged southern racial imperatives.¹⁰⁰ Even though Italians were legally “white,” Scarpaci notes that Italians lived in communities (and even apartments) integrated with African Americans, established businesses that catered to African American clientele, cooperated and interacted with African Americans as fellow wage earners and participated in “interethnic

⁹⁷ “Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-191,” 71.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Various other immigrant groups likewise followed this pattern as “middlemen minority,” a term originally coined by Edna Bonacich, including Jews (in Europe and the U.S.) and Korean business owners in Los Angeles (“A Theory of Middleman Minorities,” *American Sociological Review* 38, no. 5 (1973): 583–94).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 63. See also John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*. (New York: Atheneum, 1963), Chapter 7 and Cunningham, “The Italian, a Hindrance to White Solidarity in Louisiana, 1890-1898,” 24-5.

unionism.”¹⁰¹ As a result, scholars contend, the manner in which Italians racially interacted with their community was read through a distinctly southern lens, since those who “intermingled” with blacks could be considered inferior and suspect by association.¹⁰² Scholars concur that according to this logic, because Italians accepted “work coded as ‘black’ by local customs,” they were perceived as a “problem population...[who] did not act white.”¹⁰³ However, at least in the 1880s, press silence with regards to the Italians’ apparent defiance of the color line and racial intermingling suggests that such behavior may have been understood as less problematic than it would in later decades.¹⁰⁴

Instead, by 1890, these factors had contributed to a well-established, distinctly Sicilian, and physically integrated community of Italians living in New Orleans, estimated between 15,000-20,000, or six to eight percent of the city’s population.

¹⁰¹ Scarpaci points out significant and specific moments of Italian and African American co-mingling: She describes a 1905 yellow fever epidemic where Italians were identified as the “carriers” but “infected their black coworkers because both groups practiced the social custom of visiting their sick neighbors” (“Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-1910,” 61).

¹⁰² Scarpaci, “Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-191,” 63.

¹⁰³ Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution*, 11; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 57. Jacobson also notes that, “Free white persons’ could also lose [their] status by their association with nonwhite groups,” and that the lynching resulted from a violation of “local racial codes” (57). However, again, his primary sources from the lynching rely on evidence from the *New York Times*, not the Louisiana press. See also Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, Chapter 7 and Cunningham, “The Italian, a Hindrance to White Solidarity in Louisiana, 1890-1898,” 24-5.

¹⁰⁴ While Scarpaci makes the important intervention of noting the importance of the regional analysis of the Italian experience, an earlier and broader temporal lens may work to challenge scholarly conclusions of how Louisianans understood Italians’ racial location. Louisiana discourse conceptualized immigration strictly in terms of a binary racial construction. The *Louisiana Democrat* suggested that of the “two races...[the] only immigration we [should] obtain is white labor.”¹⁰⁴ As the *Times Democrat* suggested, “White immigrants...will help to solve the negro problem by getting rid of its colored majority and making it a white State. Let us, by all means, welcome and encourage this immigration—Louisiana wants all the white immigrants it can get who are intelligent and industrious; they will save it from race difference and disturbance and make it a prosperous State” (*Louisiana Democrat*, 2 January 1889). Within this reference, it is unclear whether foreigners were included in the category of “white” immigrants, or whether this referred solely to “white” migrants from other southern states. Still, the discourse is notably grounded in categories of “white” and “Negro,” which would manifestly inform how Louisianans understood Italians. In these terms, Louisianans would have “racialized” Italians as “non-Negroes,” which may have informed their more hospitable reception of Italian immigration to Louisiana.

Except for the occasional negative press mention and despite certain anxieties regarding Italians' propensity towards violence, their economic mobility, and their habits of racial intermingling, press discourse categorically regarded Italians in the 1870 and 1880s Louisiana as "fellow-citizens" whose arrival was not only welcomed and encouraged, but whose contributions were praised and credited with having expanded the fruit industry and profit in New Orleans.

Post-Lynching Indemnity & Citizenship Crises

Despite the preceding examples, this is also not to say that the perception of Italians/Sicilians in Louisiana/Gulf South remained static during the course of the turn-of-the-century; in fact, the very shifting nature of where and how Italians were discursively located in the Gulf South offers further evidence to understand their status as "racially transient." As I will show (in Chapter 2), press rhetoric of Italians/Sicilians most notably shifted by employing more anti-Italian rhetoric in the wake of the lynchings of Italians/Sicilians in the Gulf South during the 1890s-1900s.

Additionally, in the weeks (and even years) following each lynching, international debates arose regarding the citizenship status of the lynched victims. Because of an 1871 treaty between Italy and the United States that guaranteed "the protection of the subjects of a friendly power," Italy requested that the United States pay indemnities to the families of the victims for the "killing of [Italian] subjects

without due process of law.”¹⁰⁵ Resulting in a series of diplomatic crises, intense investigations ensued after each lynching to evaluate which of the victims were in fact Italian subjects, and thus owed indemnities, and which ones were naturalized American citizens. Complicating the matter, according to an 1879 clause in the Louisiana Constitution, a clause that remained at the forefront of the controversial disenfranchisement debate in 1898 and upon which I elaborate in Chapter 3, a foreign person could secure their right to vote solely by taking out their first set of naturalization papers and declaring their intent to naturalize.¹⁰⁶ The Italian Consul to New Orleans, Pasquale Corte claimed that as a result, many of those Italians who had “declared their intention” were not actually aware of the ramifications of the local policy: “They were still Italian subjects and desired to remain so, and had no idea that registering they were surrendering their allegiance to the King of Italy... They did not know that in registering they abandoned their Italian citizenship.”¹⁰⁷ Corte even suggested that this manipulation was the result of Louisiana politicians who “coerce[d]” Italians into registering as soon as they arrived to New Orleans; he additionally noted that Italians did not know any better, because in Italy, anyone could vote, regardless of one’s naturalization status.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Ambassador Baron Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Richard Olney, 10 January 1897, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1729, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota; “The Italian Lynching in St. Charles Parish,” *The Daily Picayune*, 14 April 1897.

¹⁰⁶ Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings*, 39. Likewise, the *Daily Picayune* explained, “A foreigner may vote in Louisiana after declaring his intention to become an American citizen” (“International Squabble,” 24 April 1891).

¹⁰⁷ “International Squabble,” *Daily Picayune*, 24 April 1891. I subsequently expand my discussion of the motives and agendas of Italian diplomats, given these claims of coercion and emphasis on the Italian citizenry of those emigrants who may have registered to vote in Louisiana.

¹⁰⁸ “International Squabble,” *Daily Picayune*, 24 April 1891. Baron Fava expressed similar sentiment concerning the Hahnville incident: “All three had had time to ask for their first and second papers. Why did

As a result of Louisiana's convoluted voting policy, determining the citizenship status of lynching victims led to a well-documented diplomatic crisis between the U.S. and Italy after the 1891 lynching.¹⁰⁹ Initially, the U.S. refused to make indemnity payments partly due to a claimed conflict between federal and state power, whereby Secretary of State Blaine claimed that he, as a representative of the federal government, could not force Louisiana to pay. Because of this refusal, Italy severed diplomatic relations with the U.S.: in March 1891, Baron Fava left Washington and returned to Italy, while the American ambassador to Italy, Albert Porter, returned to the U.S. from Italy. In turn, Corte claimed that the safety of Italians in the U.S. was at risk and requested that an Italian war vessel be sent to New Orleans. Although the ship was never sent, the request led to a war scare between the U.S. and Italy, thus severing diplomatic ties as Corte was recalled from New Orleans.¹¹⁰

An entire year passed, as it was not until April of 1892 that the U.S. did eventually pay out indemnities in the amount of \$25,000 for three victims of the 1891 lynching who were determined to be Italian subjects. Of note, having long proclaimed

they not do so? The mere fact of having voted would not have conferred upon any of the three the right of citizenship, as is amply shown in the enclosed memorandum, and if they voted, they voted illegally, and probably because they had been misled by native politicians in search of voters, legal or illegal" (Ambassador Baron Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Richard Olney, 31 December 1896, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1729, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota).

¹⁰⁹ Rimanelli and Postman, *The 1891 New Orleans Lynching and U.S.-Italian Relations: A Look Back*; Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings*, Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*; Anne Chieko Moore and Hester Anne Hale, *Benjamin Harrison: Centennial President* (New York: Nova Publishers, 2009).

¹¹⁰ Although Italy was the world's third world naval power by 1891, officials in Rome decided against making the financial investment necessary for a successful trans-Atlantic operation. That being said, because of the size and "state-of-art technology" of Italy's navy, in contrast to the U.S.'s virtually non-existent military navy, "fears in America of a large raid on its coasts were well-founded" (Marco Rimanelli, "The New Orleans Lynching & US-Italian Relations from Harmony to War-Scare: Immigration, Mafia, Diplomacy," in *The 1891 New Orleans Lynching and U.S.-Italian Relations: A Look Back*, ed. Marco Rimanelli and Sheryl L Postman (New York: P. Lang, 1992), 155-56).

the impossibility of federal intervention within state matters, the U.S. admitted no wrongdoing and insisted that the payment was simply their “solemn duty” in restoring “old and friendly relations.”¹¹¹ In turn, King Umberto of Italy ordered that diplomatic relations be resumed and lifted the ban on U.S. pork products in Italy. Yet, because of the protracted controversy, certain opinions began to read the Italian pattern of naturalization as suspect: “[Italians] seem to seek American citizenship for selfish purposes only, who, as one of our prominent Italo-American fellow-citizens has put it, are American citizens but Italians at heart... A citizen can only be true to his country if he is a citizen by heart.”¹¹²

Despite the possibly suspect motivation of Italian immigrants, such debates seemed to galvanize legal efforts by administrators in the U.S. to conceptualize Italians as American citizens. The Hahnville lynching, which I discuss at length in Chapter 2, offers particular insight into the citizenship debate regarding Italian lynching victims. Three men, Lorenzo Salardino, Salvatore Arena and Giuseppe Venterella, were lynched in Hahnville, Louisiana on August 8, 1896. The U.S. State Department claimed that the three men were citizens of the United States because they “had taken out their first naturalization papers,” all three had voted in Louisiana, they all resided in Louisiana without a “fixed intention to return to their native country,” they did not contribute to the “prosperity and wealth of Italy,” they avoided

¹¹¹ According to Secretary Blaine’s correspondence that accompanied the indemnity payment, he included the caveat, “While the injury was not inflicted directly by the United States, the President nevertheless feels that it is the solemn duty, as well as great pleasure of the Government to pay a satisfactory indemnity” (Quoted in Marco Rimanelli, “The 1891-92 U.S.-Italian Crisis and War-Scare: Foreign and Domestic Policies of the Harrison and Di Rudini Governments,” in *The 1891 New Orleans Lynching and U.S.-Italian Relations: A Look Back*, ed. Marco Rimanelli and Sheryl L Postman (New York: P. Lang, 1992), 255-56).

¹¹² “They Are Not Good Citizens,” *New York Times*, 23 March 1891.

military duty in Italy, they actively participated in politics in Louisiana and they were “citizens of the State.”¹¹³ Additionally, the state of Louisiana claimed that the lynching victims had “acted” like citizens, by voting, obtaining naturalization papers and making no intention to return to Italy.¹¹⁴

Significantly, in their efforts to prescribe citizenship onto Italians/Sicilians, American state actors emphasized a performative concept of citizenship, rather than a strictly legal definition, meaning that one could “act” like a citizen and thus be read as such. Rather than requiring evidence of a completed formal naturalization process, the U.S. State Department noted that by voting and not returning to Italy, the Hahnville victims behaved like American citizens and thus should be considered naturalized U.S. citizens. Arguably, this more informal concept of citizen would have been in the economic best interests of U.S. statesmen, since the U.S. would not have been required to pay indemnities for victims determined to be (or having declared their intention to become) American citizens. In this regard, this suggests less evidence of the U.S. State Department making an actual claim and advocating for the concept of “informal” citizenship and more a utilitarian application of a broader definition of citizen because it served the economic needs of American statesmen. As I demonstrate throughout this project, just as the racial status of Italians was transient and available for manipulation, their citizenship status was similarly transient. During

¹¹³ Ambassador Baron Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Richard Olney, 31 December 1896, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1729, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota. By “state” in this context, the U.S. State Department meant the state of Louisiana.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

the 1890s-1900s, U.S. state officials may have readily rendered Italians as American citizens, but for rather pragmatic purposes.

Conversely prescribing a more narrowed view of “formal citizen,” Baron Fava, the Italian Ambassador, disputed the assertion that the three Hahnville victims were U.S. citizens based on a number of factors. According to a number of sworn affidavits, Salardino had resided in Louisiana for twelve years and may have voted but never took out papers, Arena arrived in Louisiana in 1891 and took out his first papers but did not proceed further, and Venturella, who had been in Louisiana for three years, had neither voted nor taken out papers.¹¹⁵ In this regard, Fava noted that only federal law could grant naturalization, not state law, and that, “a mere declaration of intention does not confer citizenship.”¹¹⁶ As Fava derided the U.S. Secretary of State, “The federal laws having prescribed a uniform rule of naturalization being exclusively in Congress, the Italian government is entitled to think that the laws of Louisiana, however peculiar they may be in respect to citizenship, cannot be recognized by a foreign power.”¹¹⁷ Furthermore, since the Louisiana Constitution stipulated that “any foreigner may vote, who has taken out his first papers,” Fava

¹¹⁵ Ibid.; Ambassador Baron Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Richard Olney, 19 August 1896, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1729, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

¹¹⁶ Ambassador Baron Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Richard Olney, 31 December 1896, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1729, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota. Here, Fava cites a Supreme Court statute, whereby Justice Marshall declared, “The power of naturalization, being exclusively in Congress, certainly ought not to be controverted.” Further, Fava notes, in order for the three men to have become citizens of the U.S., they “would have had to comply with Section 2165 of the Revised Statutes.”

¹¹⁷ Ambassador Baron Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Thomas Bayard, 27 January 1897, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1729, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

presented this as “conclusive proof that any foreigner who does so vote, is still an alien.”¹¹⁸

Fava proceeded by insisting that the three victims had only been residing in the U.S. temporarily, otherwise, “they would have sent for their families, whome [sic] they had left in Italy, where they had their domicil [sic], and whom they supported from here by their labor, Venturella his wife and seven children, Arena his wife and four-year-old son, and Salardino his old father, who was unable to earn his living.”¹¹⁹

Sworn statements attested to the fact that Salardino “refused” to take out his naturalization papers because “he hoped to return home soon,” and that he had always expressed “his intention to return as soon as he could to his folks in Italy.”¹²⁰ Fava went on to stipulate that “the three men who were lynched had always expressed the intention of going back to their families in Italy, and that more especially, Venturella had been in treaty, a few days before his arrest, for the purchase of a passage ticket from New Orleans to Palermo.”¹²¹ Fava additionally countered the claim that the victims had refused to comply with military service in Italy and provided additional sworn statements that Venturella had completed his service and that Arena and

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ambassador Baron Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Richard Olney, 31 December 1896, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1729, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota. Fava continued, “It cannot be said that they had transferred their domicile to Louisiana, nor that they had no intention of returning to their native land, nor that they were not contributing to the resources and wealth of their own country. They had come here on business, that is to say, to provide by the fruits of their labor, for the comfort of their wives, children and parents, and they were thus contributing to the wealth of the country in which they had their home” (Ibid.). Fava especially notes that five of Venturella’s seven children were minors and that Salardino’s father was seventy and unable to care for himself (Ambassador Baron Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State John Sherman, 13 March 1897, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1729, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota).

¹²⁰ Ambassador Baron Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Richard Olney, 31 December 1896, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1729, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Salardino were both only sons, which meant they were in the “third class” and exempt from service.¹²²

Perhaps obscuring his underlying motives, Fava placed tremendous emphasis on the necessity of securing “just and adequate compensation...to the families of the victims.”¹²³ Citing the New Orleans and Walsenburg [Colorado] lynchings as precedents, Fava implored that “a just and suitable indemnity will speedily be granted to the eleven persons who have been left without means of subsistence by the murder committed with impunity of those who were their sole support.”¹²⁴ As the debate dragged on, Fava bemoaned the following March, “Nothing has been done as yet on behalf of the destitute families of the victims.”¹²⁵ Fava hoped that the U.S. would “promptly make suitable provision to indemnify the families of the victims. The members of these families are numerous and have been left wholly without means.”¹²⁶

It is worth noting that Fava’s insistence on the Italian citizenry of the three victims, and emphasis on the impoverished-nature of their dependents in Italy, arguably had more practical motives. In line with other post-Risorgimento policies on the part of the Italian government, like the Brigands War of the early 1860s,

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ambassador Baron Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Richard Olney, 10 January 1897, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1729, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

¹²⁵ Ambassador Baron Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State John Sherman, 13 March 1897, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1729, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

¹²⁶ Ambassador Baron Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Richard Olney, 6 September 1896, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1729, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

demanding indemnity payments may have in fact been part of the larger unification project intent on reunifying the (Italian) north/south against a “foreign” enemy. With regards to this unification project, in all likelihood, the “annexation” of southern Italy could have proceeded without such a bloody civil war like the Brigands War.

However, the intense and bitter violence emphasizes the fact that despite the rhetoric of unification and annexation, the South was only conjoined with the Italian nation through military conquest and political absolutism. Not only did unification in the South lack popular support and resulted from military occupation, but the nation-building process was partially predicated on conceptualizing the entire South as a land of criminals and defining southerners as residing outside the nation. Just as Italian officials explained the Brigands War (in reality a civil war *against* unification) to the newly unified nation as a war for the purpose of subduing southern banditry, the efforts of Italian diplomats in defending Sicilian lynching victims in the U.S. and demanding indemnities served as a rallying point for the fledgling Italian state. While this may not offer concrete insight into how citizenship was conceptualized by either American or Italian diplomats, this does suggest that Italian/Sicilian citizenship status was additionally available for exploitation and manipulation by the Italian state. Ultimately, Italy maintained a central role in shaping Italians’/Sicilians’ status in the U.S. as the way in which citizenship operated for Italians/Sicilians in the U.S. remained intimately linked to Italy’s own domestic nation-building project.

The following July, nearly a year after the lynching, correspondence reveals that the U.S. did eventually pay out indemnities on the three victims in Hahnville in

the sum of \$6000.¹²⁷ Of note, this was a declining price tag, as Italy was unable to strong-arm the U.S. and risk permanently alienating a major trading partner. For the incident in 1891, \$25,000 was paid on the three victims determined to be Italian subjects, while only \$1900 was paid for two Sicilian victims in Tallulah in 1899.¹²⁸ With regards to this international power play and its financial consequences for the U.S., it appears that the U.S. quickly grew tired of paying indemnities to Italian families while under pressure from the Italian government. Thus, American statesmen found whatever excuses, even if it meant offering Italian/Sicilian immigrants access to the rhetoric of citizenship, in order to maneuver themselves out of making indemnity payments. In line with this reasoning, Secretary of State Blaine questioned the involvement of the Italian government in state affairs: “The United States did not, by treaty with Italy, become the insurer of the lives or property of Italian subjects resident within our territory... The foreign resident must be content in such cases to share the same redress that is offered by the law to the citizen and has no just cause to complain or right to ask the interposition of his country if the courts are equally open to him for the redress of his injuries.”¹²⁹

Without a political or governmental force to advocate on their behalf, the indemnity debates also speak to the lack of recourse available to the families of African American lynching victims. Perhaps because of this lack of recourse, the

¹²⁷ G.P. Vinci Letter to U.S. Secretary of State John Sherman, 31 July 1897, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1729, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

¹²⁸ The *Lafayette Gazette* pointed out the significance of these comparatively large indemnity payments for Italians when a jury in Abilene, Kansas awarded the family of a lynched “Negro” the grand sum of \$2 (27 January 1894 (Lafayette, LA)).

¹²⁹ “The Italian Lynching,” *Daily States*, 13 August 1896.

response to the lynchings from the African American community around the country was rather ambivalent.¹³⁰ Some, in line with national discourse, explained that the victims “were not killed as Italians, but as proven murderers who had defrauded justice by corrupting a jury and they would have met the same fate had they been native Americans.”¹³¹ A certain element spoke to the “foreignness” of the Italian and the fact that the “Italian as a rule does not make a good American.”¹³² Yet, the *Plaindealer* argued, this characterization did not justify the assault.¹³³ Some opinions expressed sympathy with the Italian victims, as several accounts reported that African Americans were present at the burial of the Hahnville lynching victims, while two African American brothers provided names of the members of the lynch mob to Italian diplomatic investigators following the Tallulah incident.¹³⁴

Alternatively, other evidence suggests that black New Orleanians were present or even participated in the lynching of Italians. The *Times Democrat* offered the following description:

¹³⁰ The African American perspective to the lynching remains relevant since they were also participants in the “making of race” of Louisiana.

¹³¹ “Editorial,” *Freeman’s Lance*, 3 April 1891. (Peru, KS) I should note that only one African American newspaper from Louisiana was available, the *Southwestern Christian Advocate*; the paper expressed limited outrage regarding the lynching; their reports of Hennessy’s murder were also very limited. At least one other African American newspaper was published in New Orleans during the 1890s, the *Daily Crusader*, but I have been unable to locate their archives. To offer a more comprehensive point of view, I have incorporated opinions of the lynchings from the African American press around the country. I cite more regularly from the *Plaindealer* (a socially progressive paper from Detroit), the *Broad Ax* (a Chicago paper prone to radical and inflammatory rhetoric), and the *Washington Bee* (a D.C. paper critical of Booker T. Washington).

¹³² “New Orleans,” *Plaindealer*, 26 June 1891.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Scarpaci, “Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-191,” 67 and Cunningham, “The Italian, a Hindrance to White Solidarity in Louisiana, 1890-1898;” Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State John Hay, 15 January 1900, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1739, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota; G.C. Vinci Letter to U.S. Secretary of State John Hay, 25 July 1899, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1739, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

The scene in the immediate neighborhood of the Parish Prison when the vigilantes were at their terrible work was weird, incongruous, and in some cases incredible. At first the dwellers in that section of the city did not appear to grasp the awful nature of the tragedy that was about to be enacted. Men, women and little children stood on doorsteps and galleries watching the passing of the solemn procession, joking, laughing and cheering as though it had been a circus parade. Nearly every negro man or woman to be seen (and there were hundreds of them) wore a broad grin, while laboring men elbowed their way through the crowd shrieking and applauding as if wild with delight...The neutral ground was quickly swarming with humanity of varied colors and nationalities, high and low, rich and poor.¹³⁵

The *New York Times* offered a similar description of the interracial lynch mob.

Therefore, without assuming that African Americans participated in the lynching, it does seem that the mob-mentality had spread across class and racial lines.¹³⁶ Beyond assessing the accuracy of the above reports, it remains significant that New Orleanians at least perceived an element of African American participation and complicity in the lynching of Italians. Additionally, Italians' presumed criminality may have informed how African Americans racialized Italians, in their own right, as minority solidarity cannot be presumed.

In general, perhaps because of their experience with Southern "justice," African American responses to the lynching seemed neither surprised nor outraged. An additional response in the African American press emphasized bitterness, resulting from their observation that despite the frequency with which African

¹³⁵ *Times Democrat*, 15 March 1891. The *New Delta*, a rather unreliable New Orleans daily, reported that three blacks "dragged Bagnetto's bleeding body down the cobblestones of Orleans street by rope around his neck" (Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings*, 277). Typical of news coverage of the time, no other newspaper reported the names or descriptions of the lynch mob participants, beyond the mob's leaders.

¹³⁶ In his analysis, Brundage notes rare cases of interracial lynch mobs and "occasional" endorsements of lynchings in the African American press. He argues that cases of black participation in lynch mobs offers evidence that lynchings were not always understood as "an inherent expression of racial repression" (*Lynching in the New South*, 45-47). Yet, this conforms too closely to a binary assumption of race.

Americans were lynched, such lynchings never received the same level of investigation, publicity or upheaval. Specifically, the *Plaindealer* spoke to an awareness of the potential benefits of such publicity surrounding the New Orleans affair: “Normally, nothing is said about lynchings in the South; people will now hear about Southern ways.”¹³⁷ The African American press perspective of the Italian lynchings remain relevant in showing the extent to which Italian immigrants benefitted from their transnational position and ability to appeal to the Italian state. Further, the varied response of the African American press—sympathy, commiseration, bitterness, hostility and indifference—signal that Italians were not statically categorized as white even within the African American community, thus further highlighting the transiency of Italians within the southern racial order.

The Consolidation of Italianità & “Ascribed Nationality”

In the aftermath of the indemnity crisis, the New Orleans press hypothesized that Italian criminals would be even less likely to become citizens, since they could simply turn to the Italian government for help and support:

Probably nine-tenths of the Italians who hold political rights in Louisiana voting and holding office, are not actual citizens, but only prospectively so. At any time they can claim Italian protection and demand indemnities out of the United States treasury. They enjoy so many privileges without becoming citizens that they have every

¹³⁷ This perspective appears in varying accounts of the lynching in the African American press (*Cleveland Gazette*, *Washington Bee*, *Broad Ax*, and *Plaindealer*). The national awareness of the New Orleans issue was hypothesized as bringing greater attention to the realities of Southern violence.

inducement to remain foreign subjects, enjoying all the rights and benefits of citizenship which they do not possess.¹³⁸

What this reveals is that even while the American state attempted to construct Italians as American citizens, arguably as an economic means to avoid paying indemnities, public opinion continued to read Italians as residing outside what Bridget Anderson calls, the “community of belonging.”¹³⁹ Such presumptions and concerns regarding the ability of Sicilians to utilize the Italian state may not have been entirely misplaced. Not only did the lynching crises require a top-down reconceptualization of the Sicilian’s citizenship status, these lynching crises additionally resulted in a restructuring of Italian and Sicilian alliances in the Gulf South.

Recall the distinct settlement pattern of Sicilians in the Gulf South. While Sicilians generally made up twenty-five percent of Italian arrivals at the national level, ninety percent of Italian immigrants in Louisiana, for example, were Sicilian.¹⁴⁰ This meant that a large segment of Louisiana’s “Italian” population identified themselves (and were identified by other Italians) as distinctly Sicilian, who felt little allegiance to the Italian state and who migrated in large part because of their marginalized status in Italy. Such divisions between Italians and Sicilians in New Orleans were most directly evident in the development of Italian benevolent societies in New Orleans. The Societa Mutua Benevolenza Italiana (or the Italian Mutual

¹³⁸ “The Lynched Italians,” *Daily Picayune*, 20 April 1897. These opinions did reference the hypothetically positive result of the fact that if Italians did not become citizens, they would then be unable to vote, which would benefit Louisiana politics (“The Italians and the Mafia,” *New York Times*, 25 March 1891).

¹³⁹ Bridget Anderson, *Us and Them?: The Dangerous Politics of Immigration Control* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁴⁰ Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*. This was the result from the existing citrus trade between New Orleans and Palermo, Sicily.

Benevolent Society) was established in New Orleans as early as 1843. Yet, because Sicilians were denied membership to the *Italian Benevolent Society*, by the 1880s, several specifically Sicilian benevolent orders had been founded in New Orleans, the most prominent being: *Congregazione di San Bartolomeo Apostolo* (1879), *Societa Italiana de Beneficenza Mutua Contessa Entellina* (1886), *Societa Italiana di Mutua Beneficenza Cefalutana* (1887). Significantly, not only were these societies all Sicilian-based, but they were founded to support immigrants to New Orleans from a particular Sicilian town: “Cefalutana” means “of or from Cefalu,” membership to *Contessa Entellina* was limited to “direct male descendants of Contessiotti,” and the *San Bartolomeo Society* was founded by and offered aid to immigrants from the Island of Ustica, off the coast of Sicily.¹⁴¹ While the New Orleans press referred to these organizations as “Italian societies” and immigration officers listed their arriving members as Italians, Italians and Sicilians in Louisiana identified themselves as distinctly different, just as Usticese were unique from Contessiotti.

As discussed in the introduction, I consider this imposed identity as an “ascribed nationality,” a case of imposed citizenship activated by the movement across borders that variously resided outside of a migrant’s own self-identification. As early as 1884, at a celebration of the unification of the state of Italy, there is some effort to “unite the Italian residents” of New Orleans across their “ascribed nationality.”¹⁴² The banquet, hosted by the *Italian Mutual Benevolent Society*, did have the president of at least one Sicilian organization present, the *St. Bartholomew*

¹⁴¹ *Benevolent Society Papers*, American Italian Research Library, East Bank Regional Library, Metairie, Louisiana.

¹⁴² “The Union of Italy,” *Daily Picayune*, 2 June 1884.

Society, and one speech congratulated the gathering on the “unification of the Italian colony in this city.”¹⁴³ Yet, while enjoying a cake “crowned with a bust of the immortal poet Dante,” decorated with miniature Italian and American flags and “inscribed with the name of Garibaldi,” any sort of trans-regional alliance between Italians and Sicilians appeared more or less superficial. In toasting the “President of the United States and the American nation,” efforts appeared more focused on depicting the Italians of the city as respectable members of the community, not incorporating the city’s Sicilians within the larger Italian community.¹⁴⁴

However, during moments of crisis, such as the lynchings of Sicilians in the 1880s and 1890s in the Gulf South, *Italianità* and their “ascribed nationality” as “Italians” began to further consolidate. After the mass arrests of Italians/Sicilians in New Orleans in 1890, as quickly as November, the Italian community in New Orleans provided a unified response: The “leading Italians of the city” proposed the establishment of a “federation of the Italian societies of New Orleans” in order to “more fully protect and advance the interests of the Italian colony in Louisiana.”¹⁴⁵ When the *Gazzetta Cattolica*, New Orleans’s Italian-language Catholic press, revealed that the prisoners held at the Parish Prison were being beaten, robbed and generally mistreated, the editor Father Manoritta rose to the defense of the persecuted Sicilians: “I must and I am willing to give up my life, if necessary for the defense of the oppressed and outraged countrymen of mine.”¹⁴⁶ Additionally, Italian-language

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ “The Italian Colony,” *Daily Picayune*, 2 November 1890.

¹⁴⁶ “Father Manoritta’s Response,” *Daily Picayune*, 16 November 1890.

newspapers around the country printed daily accounts of the collections they were raising for the defense funds of the accused New Orleanian “Italians,” just as Italian communities in cities around the country would subsequently organize mass meetings to protest the lynching.¹⁴⁷ Regardless of regional differences transported from Italy or regional separation in the United States, the Italian immigrant community offered a unified response to the arrest of the Italians in New Orleans as Italians rallied behind their Sicilian “countrymen.”¹⁴⁸

In these moments, far from being a monolithic or imposed category, citizenship was in fact produced through dynamic processes and a multiplicity of influences; “informal citizenship,” which speaks to the participation of individuals in the performance and construction of their civic identity, served to both preserve and disrupt official articulations of “formal citizenship.” Sicilians appealing to the Italian consulate in New Orleans, along with claiming their Italian citizenry in order to secure indemnity payments, demonstrates instances where immigrants themselves participated in formulating their understanding of and performing their citizenship. These instances where Sicilians “declared [their] intent” as U.S. citizens while also

¹⁴⁷ See March 1891 issues of *Il Progresso* and *Cristoforo Colombo*, New York City. Similarly, the Italian community in Nevada expressed indignation against the New Orleans authorities, while adamantly differentiating between the Mafia and Italians in general (“The Hennessey Case Abroad,” *Daily Picayune*, 3 December 1890. On occasion, both primary and secondary sources spelled Hennessey’s names as “Hennessey;” in these cases, I preserve the original spelling but use the more common spelling of “Hennessey” in my own discussion.). Because of widespread fear of anti-Italian mob mentality, Italians in northern neighborhoods requested protection from their community organizations “Italians Ask Protection,” *New York Times*, 23 July 1899.

¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, despite any transported feelings of disenfranchisement from the Italian state, Italians in New Orleans flocked to the Italian consul for aid, to demand indemnities and to file suit against the city (Smith, *The Crescent City Murders*, 232). Likewise, the New York consul was reportedly “full of Italians every since the news of the tragedy came, and many of the poorer and more ignorant members of the colony seemed to feel that their lives and property in New York were endangered” (“What is Said in New York: Italian Journalists Though Still Indignant are Calmer Now,” *New York Times*, 17 March 1891).

appealing to the Italian government to intervene on their behalf, offers evidence of Sicilian immigrants utilizing their “ascribed nationality.” Although citizenship is generally understood as an assigned and fixed identity, these efforts to claim rights and space assert the fact that migrating bodies additionally participated in the construction of their own civic identity.¹⁴⁹

Further illustrating the dynamic realities of constructing citizenship and identity, something had shifted within the Sicilian community in the 1890s lynching aftermath—while Sicilians still honored, with parades and feasts, their regionally specific saints like the Cefalutana celebration of St. Salvatore, Sicilians and Italians began to present a more unified front, just as Sicilians began to demonstrate evidence of “Italianizing.”¹⁵⁰ When the Societa Italiana di Mutua Beneficenza hosted a celebration to honor and commemorate Cristoforo Colombo in 1904, members of the Sicilian benevolent societies were additionally present, seated beneath both American and Italian flags, toasting both the President of the United States and the King of Italy.¹⁵¹ In 1906, “members of every Italian society in the city” contributed to

¹⁴⁹ However, because these conversations remain primarily within the field of anthropology, I still note a glaring underrepresentation of discussions concerning participatory and performative citizenship in the existing historical discussions on citizenship.

¹⁵⁰ As the *Daily Picayune* described the most “interesting” part of the Cefalutana celebration of St. Salvador: “This feature is strictly one peculiar to the celebration of S. Salvador’s day, and consists in the competitive walking of a greasy pole outstretched thirty or forty feet over the river. The walking is done by a number of youths. The prize is \$10, and the winner of this prize must walk out to the end of the pole and secure a small flag hanging there” (“St. Salvador’s Day Celebrated by the Societa Italiana di M. B. Cefalutana,” *Daily Picayune*, 9 August 1897). Significantly, reportedly 3000 individuals gathered for the parade and competitive walking event, far more than the 200 members of the Society; this suggests that the celebration was enjoyed by New Orleanians beyond those specifically from Cefalu. For additional evidence that regional Sicilian celebrations were still held and celebrated in New Orleans, see the following: “St. Bartholomew’s Day,” *Daily Picayune*, 24 August 1899; “Contessa Entellina: The Italian Society Celebrates its Seventeenth Anniversary,” *Daily Picayune*, 9 September 1903.

¹⁵¹ “Discovery of America Celebrated by Italians: Societa Italiana di Mutua Honors the 412th Anniversary with Ceremonies and a Banquet. Mayor Capdevielle Being a Special Guest,” *Daily Picayune*, 13 November 1904.

the purchase and dedication of a statue of Giuseppe Garibaldi, revolutionary hero of Italian unification who famously invaded and conquered Sicily in 1860.¹⁵² Significant not only because Sicilians and Italians acted in tandem, but because Garibaldi remains *the* iconic figure of the Italian Risorgimento and a key symbol in the process of nationalizing the peninsula and conquering the South; Sicilian participation in *celebrating* Garibaldi demonstrates the fact that Sicilian immigrants in New Orleans in particular were beginning to adopt the nationalistic imagery of the Italian state, thus, further revealing their developing *Italianità* and marking their participation within their “ascribed nationality.”

Whether or not these Sicilian immigrants had actually begun to conceptualize themselves as Italian subjects and/or as Italian-American, I emphasize the tension between their initially superficial “ascribed nationality,” where the movement across borders resulted in the imposed nationalizing of migrating individuals, and the potential for this national identity to be subsequently internalized or at least utilized in order to take advantage of the protections granted as rights of citizenship. Such categories additionally reinforce the concept that citizenship remains a dynamic construction, neither strictly nation-based nor solely culturally or socially constructed, but co-produced in tandem by both “formal” and “informal” mutually constitutive and overlapping forces.

¹⁵² “Garibaldi Statue Unveiled in Metairie Cemetery,” *Daily Picayune*, 24 September 1906.

Ultimately, this chapter reveals several conclusions about the racial and civic identity of Italians/Sicilians in the Gulf South. First, this new 1890s anti-Italian rhetoric represents a change from how Italians were originally and less-prejudicially perceived in 1870s-80s New Orleans.¹⁵³ In contrast to widespread anti-Italian sentiment found elsewhere in the U.S., New Orleanians initially encouraged and welcomed Italian immigrants—the crux of this



¹⁵³ "From Sunny Italy, Arrival of a Shipload of Immigrants," *Times Democrat*, 18 October 1888 juxtaposed with *Daily Picayune*, 16 March 1891. The image on the left below, from 1888, represents an Italian immigrant baring a heavy load, which depicts Italians as hard-working and economically necessary laborers in Louisiana. The image on the right, from 1891, represents a shift, whereby Italian immigrants were "justifiably" lynched in front of the New Orleanian mob.

embrace resulted from Louisiana's Reconstruction-era labor shortage and the fact that immigrant labor was in such high demand. A broader historical moment and a specifically regional lens challenges the traditional version of the Italian immigrant experience and offers new insight into the overlooked and unique trajectory of Italian settlement in Louisiana.

Second, not only were Italians/Sicilians racially transient, their citizenship status was additionally in flux. This fluidity resulted from being manipulated by state actors (Italian and American) as well as immigrants' own participation and performance as citizens. Just as Italian migration was initially encouraged because of the demands for inexpensive plantation labor, economic needs additionally motivated efforts on behalf of U.S. state officials to construct Italians as American citizens. Meanwhile, Italian officials, as part of their own state-making project, utilized these lynching crises and indemnity debates to enfold Sicilians within the Italian state. Finally, however, despite the efforts of state-makers, immigrants themselves participated in the construction of their own citizenship identity—appealing to the Italian state in certain moments and attempting to render themselves as “white” Americans in others, as I will show in Louisiana's disenfranchisement debates in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2
**“Gentlemen, do you wish to kill me?
I have always thought that you were my friends.”¹:**
The Lynchings of Italians/Sicilians in Louisiana and Mississippi
(1880s-1910)

Police Chief David Hennessy was gunned down in New Orleans on October 15, 1890. As he lay bleeding in the street, Hennessy’s friend Captain William O’Connor reportedly asked him, “Who gave it to you, Dave?” Hennessy replied, “Dagoes did it.”² As a result of this claim, dozens of “suspicious” characters throughout the city were indiscriminately rounded up, including a Polish Jew and a Romanian, both of whom were released when they were discovered to be non-Italian. Eventually, nineteen suspects were indicted and imprisoned at the Parish Prison, including a fourteen-year-old boy named Gasperi and a “fool” named Emmanuelle Polizzi.³

The ensuing court trial lasted for six months until finally, on March 13, 1891, the jury reached a verdict. Two of the accused were acquitted by order of the judge, four others were declared not guilty, and a mistrial was ruled for the remaining three due to reasonable doubt and contradictory and insufficient evidence. Almost immediately, accusations of bribery and jury tampering swept through the native-

¹ Francesco Difatta (lynching victim), report of the Acting Consul of Italy at New Orleans to the Royal Embassy at Washington, 1 August 1899, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1739, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

² It should be noted that O’Conner was the only one who heard this remark and never took the witness stand during the trial. Additionally, although Hennessy lived for an additional eleven hours, he never suggested the specific identity of his assailants. See Chapter 1 for an expanded analysis of the term “dago.”

³ Tom Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings: The Murder of Chief Hennessy, the New Orleans “Mafia” Trials, and the Parish Prison Mob* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2007), 98. Secondary sources argue that Polizzi likely suffered from schizophrenia.

born, white community in New Orleans. Officially explained as a temporary measure, the prisoners were remanded back to the Parish Prison.⁴

The next day, the following announcement headlined the *Daily Picayune*, *Times Democrat* and *New Delta*: “Justice. Do the Good People of New Orleans Want It? All good citizens are invited to attend a mass meeting on Saturday, March 14 at 10 o’clock am at Clay Statue to take steps to remedy the failure of justice in the Hennessy Case. Come prepared for action.” Far from being anonymous, the notice was signed by the Committee of Fifty, made up of some of the city’s most well known citizens and prominent business figures. A mob estimated at between six and eight thousand answered the call.⁵ Following a number of rousing speeches, the crowd made their way to the prison. Once the mob burst through the barricaded prison doors, they killed those Italians they could find—eleven in total, five of whom had already been found not guilty; the remaining six had yet to have their day in court. The body of one of the victims, Jim Caruso, was discovered with forty-two bullet wounds; Antonio Marchesi’s wounds were not immediately fatal but, after being denied medical attention, he succumbed nine hours later. The mob spared the fourteen-year old Gaspari, but dragged Antonio Bagnetto and Polizzi outside to be hanged and shot in front of the crowd, resulting in one of the largest mass lynchings in U.S. history.

⁴ It is unclear whether this was done for their own “protection” as claimed, or if the court was complicit with the intentions of the public’s demand for “justice.” Additionally, ten of the accused Italians remained imprisoned, although they had yet to be tried.

⁵ Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings*, 217; Anthony V Margavio and Jerome J Salomone, *Bread and Respect: The Italians of Louisiana* (Gretna, La.: Pelican Pub. Co., 2002), 212.

Local and national media coverage of the New Orleans lynching was widespread, which has since resulted in the 1891 event receiving the principal attention, both historically and historiographically, within scholarship on the lynchings of Italians. Yet, the 1891 lynching was not the only lynching of Italians and Sicilians in the Gulf South during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.⁶ Over two dozen Italians were lynched in the Gulf South during this time period, including an Italian by the name of Villarosa in Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1886, “Dago Joe” in Shelby Depot, Mississippi in 1887, three Sicilians in Hahnville, Louisiana in 1896, five Sicilians in Tallulah, Louisiana in 1899 and a Sicilian father and son in Erwin, Mississippi in 1901.⁷ In part an act of historical recovery, this chapter presents a more comprehensive accounting of these lynchings, providing a history of those cases where little-to-no scholarship exists (Vicksburg and Erwin) and offering certain historical correctives by supplementing and revising the current historiographical assessments of others (Shelby Depot and Hahnville).

⁶ Even though scholars do mention the events in 1896 Hahnville, Louisiana and 1899 Tallulah, Louisiana, much of the documentation around the 1891 case has led the scholarship to treat it as a singular, watershed moment.

⁷ While I make note of Ashraf Rushdy’s (*The End of American Lynching* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2012)) effort to broaden the definition of lynching and his caution against discounting those deaths that occurred in riots when they might be more accurately identified as lynchings, I have chosen not to include an in-depth analysis of the death of Giuseppe Testa and another unknown Italian on 14 May 1906 in Marion, North Carolina or the deaths of two unknown Italians in Chathamville, Louisiana in 1907 or the deaths of two Sicilians in Tampa, Florida in 1910. Despite the extensive diplomatic correspondence on the incident in Marion, North Carolina, these deaths occurred in the midst of a labor riot at the Spruce Pine Carolina Co. where Italians were employed in railroad construction (See Letters from G.C. Montagna Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Elihu Root, June-July 1906, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1734, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota). The events in Chathamville occurred under similar circumstances of a labor riot. While these deaths should certainly be considered within narratives of labor and immigrant violence, I do not analyze them as lynchings per se since these men may have died accidentally in the course of the riots. Additionally, while I will address the historiographical claims regarding the lynching of Angelo Albano and Castenge Ficarotta on 20 September 1910 in Tampa, Florida, my primary source analysis will be restricted to the earlier incidents mentioned.

Beyond recovering an untold history, this chapter also contributes to the existing literature on lynching by revealing a more varied lynching culture in the South. Using the lens of the new lynching historiography, I show both the continuity between the various lynchings of Italians and Sicilians across the (broadly-defined) Gulf South as well as the specific circumstances that led to each incident. Given the history of lynching as a race-based violence and racialized vigilantism, I analyze the roots of what made Italians lynchable, meaning what circumstances were in place that made it possible for Italians to receive a punishment typically reserved for African Americans and other non-Europeans.⁸ Certainly, race, ethnicity, exceptionality and perceived status as “outsiders” marked Italians at risk for being lynched. Yet, in spite of the prevailing interpretation of lynching as race-based violence, and while an existing anti-Italian racial discourse was used to explain, justify and validate these lynchings, race(ism) alone cannot explain the motives behind the lynchings of Italians/Sicilians as Italians were not lynched *because* they were Italian. Instead, performing a close reading of these historical moments reveals that context, especially economic implications, remains critical for understanding the motives behind these lynchings.

Furthermore, as mentioned in my introduction, the fact that Italians and Sicilians in the Gulf South were subject to lynching, and the abject disavowal of citizenship and community standing it conveyed, exceeds the explanatory power of existing frameworks. As a result, the racialization of Italians in the region requires a

⁸ Addressing the question of what connected the lynchings of those victims identified as Italian remains critical to understanding why Italians were the only Europeans to have been lynched in large numbers.

more qualified terminology—Italians were not necessarily “in-between” and they were not always “white on arrival.” Accordingly, in reconsideration of the existing scholarship of critical whiteness studies, Italians in the Gulf South acted and were marked as racially transient, meaning that the way Italians were racialized changed (and even moved back and forth) over time. Emphasizing the flexibility and mobility of Italian/Sicilian racialization, which eventually and joltingly moved Italians into the white mainstream, underscores how the Italians’ unfixed racial identity additionally served to complicate race relations throughout the Gulf South.

According to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a lynching may be so defined when it meets the following criteria: “there must be evidence that a person was killed, the person must have met death illegally, a group of three or more persons must have participated in the killing (to rule out personal vendettas, etc.), [and] the group must have acted under the pretext of protecting justice or tradition.”⁹ However, part of the difficulty in pinning down a definition of lynching is the fact that lynching derived its power from its attempt to make meaning through violence. Through a conscious rejection of law, in part a rejection of language, lynching possessed both a discursive afterlife as well as an ability to mark space with violence. Because of the numerical realities of vigilante violence, where six out of seven lynching victims were black or mixed-race men or

⁹ NAACP, quoted in Lisa D. Cook, “Converging to a National Lynching Database: Recent Developments and the Way Forward,” *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 45, no. 2 (2012): 56. *Project HAL: Historical American Lynching Data Collection*, based on the NAACP Lynching Records located at Tuskegee University, also uses this as their official definition and means of evaluating what sorts of instances count as a lynching.

adolescent boys, the main body of contemporary lynching historiography has remained focused on the southern, black, male victim.¹⁰ Historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage, credited with having established the basic framework for historical studies of lynching, defined lynching specifically as “a southern and racial phenomena” of vigilante violence used to restore white supremacy.¹¹ Scholars conclude that the systemized and ritualized acts of terror of lynching served as a form of racialized punishment in the South, employed to intimidate the African American population and to unify white communities. Not only did lynchings receive community approval and require communal complicity, but most were predicated upon vengeance, punishment of an alleged crime and the “pervasive belief in black criminality.”¹²

In terms of assessing the reasons behind the lynching of black men, in their most recent analysis of southern lynching victims, sociologists Bailey and Tolnay developed a typology of alleged infractions: violent action or threat of violence, sexual overtone, attacked because of a connection to someone (either related to or

¹⁰ Amy Kate Bailey and Stewart Emory Tolnay, *Lynched: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 183. See also, Amy Bailey et al., “Targeting Lynch Victims: Social Marginality or Status Transgressions?,” *American Sociological Review* 76, no. 3 (2011): 412–36; Amy Kate Bailey et al., “Personalizing Lynch Victims: A New Database to Support the Study of Mob Violence,” *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 41, no. 1 (2008): 47–64; E. M Beck and Timothy Clark, “Strangers, Community Miscreants, or Locals: Who Were the Black Victims of Mob Violence?,” *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 35, no. 2 (2002): 77–83; Stewart Emory Tolnay and E. M Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

¹¹ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 8.

¹² Ken Gonzales-Day, *Lynching in the West, 1850-1935* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 247. Certainly, this narrowed demographic focus has allowed for significant correctives regarding the motivation behind lynching. For example, while contemporaries at the turn-of-the-century argued that African Americans were lynched as a means of protecting white women and white women’s bodies, Ida B. Wells-Barnett famously demonstrated, despite claims to the contrary, that, in fact, less than one-third of lynchings actually involved a rape charge. Wells-Barnett thus exposed that rape accusations were only a guise to excuse and justify the real motives behind lynching: an effort to quash black economic progress. Wells-Barnett revealed that whites used lynching “to get rid of Negroes who were acquiring wealth and property...and thus [to] keep the race terrorized” (Ida B Wells-Barnett, *On Lynchings: Southern Horrors; A Red Record; Mob Rule in New Orleans* (New York: Arno Press, 1892)).

trying to protect an alleged offender), property offenses (burglary, etc.), character violation, “challenger” offenses meaning someone “def[ied] the prevailing racial and economic hierarchies,” rebellious actions (arson, etc.) and unknown or those that defied easy classification.¹³ Ultimately, they conclude that “standing out as an exception within the general African American population” was the primary factor that made a black man more at risk for being lynched.¹⁴ It was their exceptionality, not a specific characteristic, which made certain black men more likely to be lynched. For example, “successful” black men were only more likely to be lynched if they lived in an area with few successful black men. If the U.S. census identified an individual as “mulatto,” their risk of being lynched was only reduced if they, unexceptionally, lived in an area with a high number of mixed-race persons.¹⁵ While Bailey and Tolnay apply their argument of “exceptionality” largely in terms of assessing the reasons behind the lynchings of African American male victims, I will demonstrate how the concept of “exceptionality” remains a contributing factor in the cases of Italian and Sicilian lynchings.

It should be noted that the historical and contemporary data inventories of lynching victims, upon which the existing historiography is based, contain a number of well-known problems.¹⁶ The most glaring oversight in these inventories, and one

¹³ Bailey and Tolnay, *Lynched: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence*, 192.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Chapter 7. Bailey and Tolnay offer several other examples of this phenomenon—if an individual was born out of state, they were more likely to be lynched *only* if the community in which they lived contained few out of state residents. Agricultural workers were only more likely to be lynched if they were the exception and lived in an area with few black agricultural workers.

¹⁶ First and foremost, because of the historical origins of when these inventories were collected, most lynching series only include data from 1882 onwards. Additionally, because of the political focus of the data collectors, rightfully interested in revealing the dangerous realities of life for black Americans at the turn of

with particular resonance for this dissertation, is the means by which lynching victims have been racially classified. The three main historical inventories, the *Chicago Tribune*, the NAACP, and Tuskegee University all identified lynching victims solely as either “black or white.”¹⁷ Such means of classification becomes especially problematic, since “Chinese, Hispanic, Italian, Native American and [victims of] other distinct ancestry” were all categorized within the category of “white.”¹⁸ Because of this geographic and binary racial focus, lynching has thus been understood as only a crime perpetrated against black men that only happened at one particular historical moment.¹⁹ But, what of the more atypical victims?

the century, these data inventories focus primarily on the lynchings of African Americans in the American South. As a result, the data entirely misses the Reconstruction era as well as those lynchings that occurred in the West or Midwest. Rushdy questions this long-standing practice, suggesting that these figures may be both over-determined as well as limited and may not be truly representative of this historical violence (*The End of American Lynching*). In concurrence, scholars conclude that the number of lynching victims found in these inventories may be both under and over-reported. For example, lynchings that were not considered “newsworthy,” or were only reported in regional papers, may have been easily missed in the data compilation. Furthermore, because of their vested political interest in securing federal anti-lynching legislation, scholars note that the NAACP may have systematically over-counted victims in their compilation of statistics (Cook, “Converging to a National Lynching Database,” 58).

¹⁷ The *Chicago Tribune* began publishing yearly tabulations of lynchings in 1883; these collections became the basis for Ida Wells-Barnett’s anti-lynching publications. Tuskegee University began collecting lynching data a bit later, in 1892, but because they continued collecting data until 1968, their records became the most widely cited and used lynching statistics. Using the *Chicago Tribune* as their basis, the NAACP began collecting data in 1912 and compiled their summary of lynching occurrences between 1889-1918 in *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States*. It is upon these historical data inventories that the contemporary lynching historiography developed. In their ground-breaking study *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynching, 1882-1930*, sociologists Steward E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck comparatively analyzed the lynching data from the *Tribune*, the NAACP and Tuskegee University. Using newspaper reporting to verify each instance of lynching, they confirmed and supplemented the existing data on each case by adding gender, race of mob and alleged offense. In 1997 (and later updated in 2004), Beck and Tolnay published their lynching inventory—this inventory now serves as the most comprehensive lynching data inventory. Using Beck and Tolnay’s inventory as a starting point, *Project HAL: Historical American Lynching Data Collection Project* now provides an open-source, web-based access to this lynching data (Cook, “Converging to a National Lynching Database”). Significantly, the practice of identifying victims as either black/white has continued in the Beck/Tolnay and *Project HAL* inventories.

¹⁸ Cook, “Converging to a National Lynching Database,” 59.

¹⁹ It should be noted that lynching scholarship has since expanded to provide a more geographically and racially comprehensive assessment of lynchings in the U.S. For other scholars who have worked to move lynching studies outside the South and beyond the black/white binary, see the following: Michael J. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874-1947* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Michael J. Pfeifer, *The Roots of Rough Justice: Origins of American Lynching* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011); Gonzales-Day, *Lynching in the West, 1850-1935*; Rushdy, *The End of American Lynching*. Of

Beyond Ken Gonzales-Day, who compiled an account of the lynchings of the hundreds of Native Americans, Chinese and Mexicans in California between 1850 and 1935, few scholars have engaged at any length with non-black lynching victims. For example, Brundage makes little more than a cursory distinction between the lynching of “whites” and the lynching of “ethnic whites,” as he notes that in the parlance of the time, “when white men merit lynching they are lynched.”²⁰ Bailey and Tolnay do devote an entire chapter to the more atypical lynching victim, however, the time and place context seems to have been lost within the efforts of these social scientists to extrapolate larger patterns and claims from the statistically small sampling of “white” lynching victims. Bailey and Tolnay conclude that compared to black/mixed race victims, white men were “significantly *more likely* to have been accused of violent offenses or generic accusations of having a bad character...[and] much *less likely* to have been accused of offenses with sexual overtones.”²¹ They additionally note that white male victims were nearly twice as likely to have been

note, even Brundage himself, soon after the publication of his foundational work on lynching in 1993, began to approach lynching studies differently. Within his edited collection *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (1997), his definition expanded with regards to “what constituted a lynching.” Lynching victims were no longer only African American men, nor were the victimizers always white southerners. As demonstrated by Nancy McClean’s reinterpretation of the lynching of Jewish factory owner Leo Frank in 1915, rather than standard interpretations of the lynching, she defined this violence as “reactionary populism.” Within the same collection, E.M. Beck and Steward E. Tolnay presented a discussion of same-race lynchings where they charted the number of African Americans who were lynched by African American lynch mobs. Beck and Tolnay argued that this phenomenon spoke to the fact that because African Americans were ignored by the criminal justice system, African American communities were forced to take matters into their own hands (W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997)).

²⁰ *Augusta News*, 22 July 1897, as quoted in as quoted in Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 1993, 86.

²¹ Bailey and Tolnay, *Lynched: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence*, 192; emphasis theirs.

born outside of the state where they were lynched.²² Bailey and Tolnay conclude that “white” men were thus lynched because of their lack of “social embeddedness” and because of a particular “outsider” status.²³ While admitting their limited means of measuring “social marginality,” Bailey and Tolnay consider the following as indicators of a lack of social embeddedness: born out of state, unnamed in newspaper accounts, unemployed, unmarried and enumerated in the census as unrelated to the head of household.²⁴ Yet, they cite the “eleven Italian immigrants roused out of jail in New Orleans on March 14, 1891” as a direct example of the fact that “many of these men [white, male lynching victims]...were easily identified as outsiders.”²⁵ The numbers can only tell us so much and it is here that I will work to invoke Rushdy’s definitional correction, since analyzing both the capacious and specific aspects of the Sicilian victims of lynching in Louisiana and Mississippi suggests that such victims were not lynched because they were necessarily “easily identified as outsiders;” one’s status as an outsider was certainly a condition that made lynching possible, but not the cause itself.²⁶ In addition to complicating Bailey and Tolnay’s definition of “social embeddedness” and its assessment of Sicilians being categorically un-

²² 28.7% of white male victims were born outside of the state in which they were lynched, compared to 16.1% of African American male victims (Bailey and Tolnay, *Lynched: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence*, Chapter 7).

²³ *Ibid.*, 196.

²⁴ As they explain, “We assume that black men who were lynched outside of their state of birth had weaker connections to the local community than those men who had not moved across a state line” (*Ibid.*, 100). Bailey and Tolnay additionally account for the significance of local context: “It is possible that being born out of state sent a stronger signal of being an outsider in communities where most residents were born in the state than it did in areas with many migrants from out of state” (*Ibid.*, 110).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 184. I will elaborate on this further, but to begin with, given the international and highly mobile context of New Orleans, having been born outside the state (or country) in would not necessarily suggest evidence of a victim’s exceptionality.

²⁶ Rushdy suggests a new vocabulary to allow us to better distinguish and understand the historical continuities and particularities of lynchings: capacious (historically continuous) and specific (historically particular) (*The End of American Lynching*).

embedded, I trace the very real historical particularities to provide insight into why Sicilians could be and were marked as lynchable, while at the same time demonstrating that these Sicilians were not lynched *because* they were outsiders. Furthermore, while Bailey and Tolnay provide tremendous insight into the motives behind atypical lynchings, their failure to problematize the category of “white” remains an oversight that I work to correct.²⁷

Among the few historians who have analyzed more atypical lynching victims at greater length, W.D. Carrigan and C. Webb’s 2013 work performed an in-depth analysis of Mexican lynching victims between 1848-1928, whom they term the “forgotten dead.”²⁸ Carrigan and Webb conclude that although the majority of Mexican lynchings occurred during an earlier historical moment (1850s and 1870s), Mexicans fell victim to lynching for similar reasons as those that motivated vigilantism more broadly: economic competition and racial prejudice.²⁹ Significantly, Carrigan and Webb found that vigilante violence against Mexicans, in contrast to African Americans, was uniquely characterized in several ways. Firstly, while about one-third of African Americans were victimized because of an alleged violation of sexual norms, only 2.4% of Mexican victims were lynched on these same grounds;

²⁷ Bailey and Tolnay suggest that, “Because white men’s social transgressions would not be interpreted by other white community members through the lens of racial hierarchy, we might anticipate that white men would be less likely to have been lynched for acts constructed to challenge the prevailing power dynamics” (Bailey and Tolnay, *Lynched: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence*, 190). However, this assumption that “white men” would not have “challenge[d] the prevailing power dynamics” suggests a monolithic view of whiteness.

²⁸ William D Carrigan and Clive Webb, *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence against Mexicans in the United States, 1848-1928*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2013). Additionally an analysis of public memory and why these victims were overlooked in lynching histories, their recovery satisfies a glaring gap in the existing historiography.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

instead, Mexicans were more often lynched because of accusations of murder or accusations of theft/robbery.³⁰ Carrigan and Webb also found that Mexican lynching victims often died in small groups, signifying the fact that Mexicans were targeted as a group not as individuals. Mexican victims, Carrigan and Webb note, were rarely killed in “spectacle lynchings,” due in part to the impact of the border (and fear of escape, which meant that lynchings of Mexicans was more hurried) as well as concern over possible federal intervention. Furthermore, Carrigan and Webb contend that Mexicans were lynched because of their cultural distance from “whites” and “whites” unfamiliarity with the religion and language of Mexican residents. In fact, Carrigan and Webb conclude that the “explicit goal” behind the lynching of Mexicans was to expel Mexicans from the U.S. and to “initiate an exodus.”³¹ While lynchings of African Americans were more motivated by efforts to maintain social control, impose “de facto second-class citizenship” and to enforce conformity to the racial hierarchy, Carrigan and Webb suggest that anti-Mexican violence might be more comparable to anti-black violence in the North as both forms of violence were racially motivated and performed in an effort to expel them from the region.

The Mexican case makes for an interesting comparison with Sicilians since even though they diverged from patterns of “typical” lynchings, both were still part of the more varied southern lynching culture and a more expanded conception of southern vigilante violence. In addition to their shared status as racial and religious

³⁰ Over 60% of Mexicans were lynched because of accusations of murder, as compared with less than 40% of African American victims; 18% of Mexicans were lynched because of accusations of theft/robbery, as compared with only 4% of African American victims (Ibid., 64).

³¹ Ibid.

outsiders, the patterns of Italian and Sicilian lynchings fit better with patterns of violence towards Mexicans, which suggests a more varied lynching culture in the South. Like Sicilians, Mexicans were legally white, more specifically considered a “racial hybrid of European, Indian and African blood,” just as Sicilians were regarded as “born criminals” because of their subsidiary European identity with historically Arab and African roots.³² Yet, because of the perceived “inferior[ity of their] religion and culture... class, national origin, ethnic background and skin color” all worked to inform how native-born whites perceived and treated Mexicans.³³ As a result, conclusions regarding the lynchings of Mexicans are both consistent and contrary in significant ways to the lynchings of Sicilians. Firstly, like Mexicans, Sicilians were often lynched in groups rather than as individuals, in part because Sicilians lived and worked among other Sicilians; as I will demonstrate, on occasion, Sicilians were lynched not because of their relation to an alleged crime but because of their proximity (geographically and personally) to other accused Sicilians. Secondly, like Mexican victims and unlike African American victims, Sicilians were much less likely to be lynched because of a sexual crime; instead, Sicilians, like Mexicans, were much more often lynched because of an alleged “murderous assault” or shooting. Like Mexicans, few Sicilians (aside from the 1891 mass lynching in New Orleans) were lynched in “spectacle”-style lynchings, most likely because of the attendant

³² Ibid., 53. Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 85 and 118. According to Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafer, the editors of this most recent translation, Lombroso “emphasized the importance of race for explaining high rates of violent crime. Having been conquered over the centuries by a number of foreign peoples—including North African Arabs—the south was inhabited by a racially mixed people, who, in Lombroso’s view, shared a propensity for murder with their nonwhite ancestors” (18).

³³ Ibid., 54-59.

intervention of the Italian government, their reoccurring demands for indemnity payments and the threat of diplomatic severance.

Conversely, several of the conclusions regarding the lynchings of Mexicans remain inconsistent with the cases of Sicilian lynchings. For example, in those instances where Mexicans were lynched, such events often received the tacit support of both the state and federal government. Alternatively, the lynchings of Sicilians really only received local, regional and implicit approval of the state governments, not federal approval, since the federal government paid out indemnities in order to maintain diplomatic ties with Italy. Additionally, while certainly a cultural distance existed between native-born whites and the Sicilian community, religion did not play an overly key role in their lynching (at least not in Louisiana) nor were communities necessarily “unfamiliar” with the Sicilians who were lynched. While Catholicism similarly positioned Sicilians and Mexicans as outside the community norm, anti-Sicilian discourse was not ground in religious inferiority nor were the lynchings of Sicilians motivated by a declared religious animosity. Despite historiographical conclusions to the contrary, the Sicilians who were lynched in Louisiana and Mississippi may have been susceptible to being lynched because of their “outsider” status but, unlike Mexicans, they were not necessarily lynched *because* they were outsiders. Finally, Carrigan and Webb suggest that Mexicans may have been lynched as an effort to threaten them into self-banishment, while this same motivation does not appear to be present in the lynchings of Sicilians since the labor of Sicilians was

in such high demand.³⁴ More consistent with the motivation of the African American lynchings, Sicilians appear to have been lynched more as a means of social and economic control.

Few scholars, outside Italian American studies, have even considered the lynchings of Italians and Sicilians or performed a comprehensive case study of these incidents.³⁵ Of these scholars, most focused their efforts strictly on the New Orleans lynching in their effort to uncover “who killa de chief.”³⁶ Only Clive Webb’s essay in *Lynching Reconsidered*, mentioned in the previous chapter, presents a broad overview of the various lynchings of Sicilians in the South.³⁷ Of great significance, Webb

³⁴ While demands for labor and a desire for “self-banishment” are not necessarily mutually exclusive, this does reveal an inherent contradiction within anti-Mexican and anti-Italian policies, as different parties represented different interests and lynch mobs may not have represented the economic demands big agriculture.

³⁵ Brundage noted that more work needs to be done on the lynchings of Italians in Louisiana (*Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*, 15).

³⁶ The phrase “who killa de chief” was a contemporary reference in mock-Italian dialect that assumed Italians guilty of Chief Hennessy’s murder, which subsequently led to their lynching in 1891. Much has been written on the 1891 lynching; originally begun as an apologia in the 1940s, Italian scholars in the 1970s hypothesized various conspiracy theories in an attempt to uncover the “real” motives behind the lynching and to reclaim Italian-American identity from the imposed Mafia stereotype. Richard Gambino, the most prominent of these scholars and one whose theories I will subsequently discuss, established one of the predominant interpretations of the incident. Gambino hypothesizes that Hennessy was actually killed as a result of local politics, but that Italians were conveniently scapegoated for the murder (*Vendetta: The True Story of the Largest Lynching in U.S. History* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977). For more on “who killa de chief,” see also John V. Baiamonte, “Who Kill de Chief? Revisited: The Hennessey Assassination and Its Aftermath, 1890-1991,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 33, no. 2 (1992): 117–46; Barbara Botein, “The Hennessy Case: An Episode in Anti-Italian Nativism,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 20, no. 3 (1979): 261–79; John S Kendall, “Who Kill de Chief?” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, 22, no. 2 (1939): 492-530; Humbert S Nelli, *The Business of Crime: Italians and Syndicate Crime in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Rimaneli and Postman, *The 1891 New Orleans Lynching and U.S.-Italian Relations*, 1992. Other more recent scholarship like Tom Smith’s *Crescent City Murders* and Anthony V Margavio and Jerome J Salomone’s *Bread and Respect*, both of which I owe a great debt for helping to establish the context for my own scholarship, confirm Gambino’s interpretation; however, Smith focuses strictly on New Orleans while Margavio and Salomone make only a cursory mention of the Hahnville and Tallulah lynchings in Louisiana without engaging in those elsewhere in the Gulf South. (Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings: The Murder of Chief Hennessy, the New Orleans “Mafia” Trials, and the Parish Prison Mob*; Margavio and Salomone, *Bread and Respect*).

³⁷ Clive Webb, “The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886-1910,” in *Lynching Reconsidered: New Perspectives in the Study of Mob Violence*, ed. William D. Carrigan (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008), 175–204.

points out that no other *ethnic* group, besides Mexicans, was lynched with greater frequency. Webb rightly attempts to “break down the black/white paradigm” of lynching scholarship, while also remaining critical of those scholars who have not attempted to place the lynching of Sicilians within the larger context of black/white mob violence.³⁸ Webb notes that although historians have long been aware of the Hahnville and Erwin lynching, very little has been written on either; Webb also offers the only secondary recounting of the Shelby Depot or Chathamville lynchings.³⁹ While I appreciate Webb’s own recovery efforts, as I previously mentioned and upon which I will subsequently elaborate, I question Webb’s reading of some of his primary sources since he does not appear to problematize their temporality or bias. I share as well as question several of Webb’s conclusions. I concur with both Webb’s consideration that Sicilians occupied an “anomalous position within the southern racial order” (although southerners did not consider Sicilians “black”) and his assessment that the lynchings of Sicilians were motivated by “economic competition rooted in racial prejudice.”⁴⁰ However, I problematize Webb’s suggestion that Sicilians were lynched because they “transgressed racial boundaries” by interacting or intermingling with African Americans; I also supplement and correct several of Webb’s conclusions regarding the Shelby Depot, Hahnville and Erwin lynchings.⁴¹

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

³⁹ Edward F Haas appears to provide the only scholarly account of the Tallulah lynching (“Guns, Goats, and Italians: The Tallulah Lynching of 1899,” *North Louisiana Historical Association* XIII, no. 2 (1982)).

⁴⁰ Clive Webb, “The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886-1910,” 178 and 187.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 185.

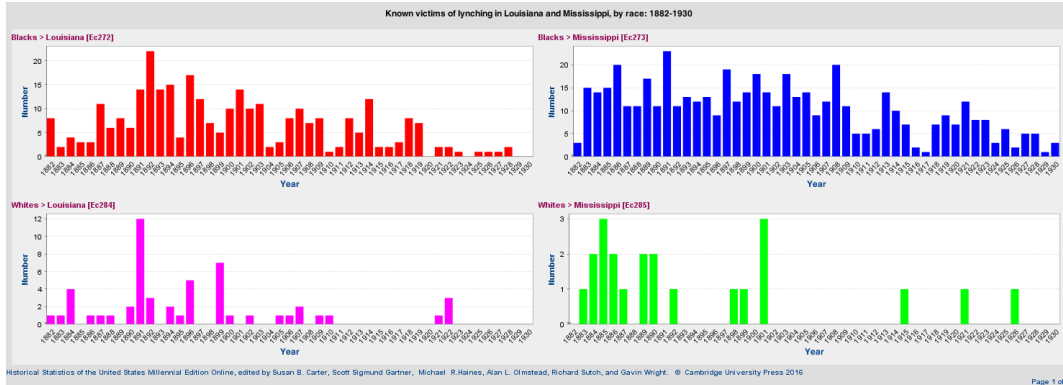
Between 1882 and 1930, 352 people were lynched in Louisiana; of those 352, 301 were black, forty-eight were categorized as “white” and three as “other.”⁴² During the same time period, 537 people were lynched in Mississippi; of those, 508 were black, twenty-two were categorized as “white” and seven as “other” or unknown. When analyzing the offenses and controlling for just those victims identified as “white” (14% of total victims in Louisiana and only 4% in Mississippi), the statistics reveal that, like those statewide, the majority of victims were lynched for violent action like murder, more than half in Louisiana and 40% in Mississippi. In Louisiana, only 6% of victims were lynched for rebellious actions, while one victim in Mississippi was lynched for “political prejudice.” Finally, only 4% or two victims were accused of rape or attempted rape in Louisiana, while five victims were lynched on charges of rape in Mississippi.⁴³ This further confirms what scholars have previously assessed regarding certain racial stereotypes—while black men were characterized as “sexual predators,” this stereotype was not systematically applied to white men.⁴⁴ Interestingly, over 12% of white male victims in Louisiana were

⁴² These statistics and the subsequent data are compiled from my own analysis of the raw lynching data from *Project HAL*, which supplies a compiled data file of those lynchings originally recorded by the NAACP as well as user-generated recordings. The *Project HAL* data includes date, location, victim’s name, race, sex, race of the lynch mob and alleged offense; reported but unverified incidents of lynchings are noted within the data. Focusing my analysis on those incidents reported in Louisiana and Mississippi, I recorded all lynching victims reported as “white” and categorized their alleged offenses based on the Bailey/Tolnay typology.

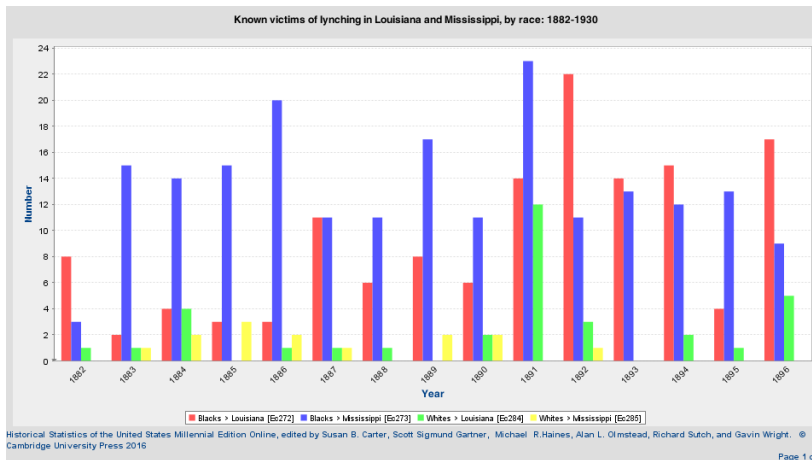
⁴³ As compared with 14% in Louisiana, “white” lynching victims made up only 4% of the total number of lynching victims in Mississippi. Because of the comparatively fewer numbers of “white” lynching victims within a larger total number of lynching victims in Mississippi, as a fraction of the total, nearly a quarter of “white” victims in Mississippi were lynched because of charges of rape. While this appears to be statistically significant, because of the small sample size, this does not mean that “whites” were categorically stereotyped as “sexual predators” since the raw number only accounts for four victims.

⁴⁴ However, perhaps a surprising low number given the historical stereotype, only about 5% of black victims in Louisiana were lynched for “challenger” or race-based offenses, like miscegenation, “improper attention to a white girl,” incendiary language, or “insulting a white man.”

lynched for “challenger” offenses such as “anger[ing] klan,” “political causes,” and “being a foreign worker.”⁴⁵



46



Why would white men have been twice as likely as black men to have been lynched for violating the “prevailing racial

and economic hierarchies”? Perhaps, by the end of the nineteenth century, black men had been more thoroughly conditioned to conform to the racial hierarchy in the Gulf South. Or, perhaps this was one of the primary reasons behind the lynching of white men—to compel compliance and adherence to the racial and economic hierarchies.

Statistically, the sample size is far too small to make a categorical claim, yet the

⁴⁵ This is in comparison with only 5% of black male victims in the Louisiana who were lynched for “challenger” offenses. The victims lynched for “being foreign workers” were the two previously mentioned Sicilians who were killed in Chathamville, LA in 1907.

⁴⁶ These graphs were generated by the *Historical Statistics of the United States Millennial Edition Online*, edited by Susan B. Carter, Scott Sigmund Gartner, Michael R. Haines, Alan L. Olmstead, Richard Sutch and Gavin Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), Accessed 26 March 2016.

meaning of these events is additionally revealed through their discursive afterlives. This requires turning to the historical particularities of the various lynchings of Italians/Sicilians in the Gulf South in order to uncover what marked these individuals as lynchable, what led to these instances of lynchings and how these lynchings impacted concepts of race and citizenship throughout the region between 1880 and 1910.

New Orleans, 1890-1891

Beginning with the most infamous lynching event in 1891 New Orleans, I return to Hennessey's murder, upon which this chapter began, an incident rooted in local politics and regional economic tensions. In the midst of his work to crack down on the violence in New Orleans, Chief Hennessey had become entangled in a feud between two rival groups of Sicilians in New Orleans, the Matrangas, who had since secured control of the citrus trade importation contracts and employed the stevedores/dockworkers, and the Provenzanos, who had previously managed the fruit-unloading contracts.⁴⁷ After an attempted murder of Charles Matranga, despite originally being unable to identify his assailants, Matranga went on to accuse the Provenzanos. When the two Provenzano brothers were jailed and awaiting trial, Hennessey was allegedly sympathetic to their case over Matranga's accusation. Matranga and his associates were later accused of organizing the conspiracy to

⁴⁷ Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings*, 40. Matranga and Locascio had secured control of the stevedore contracts by making the Fruit Laborer's Association, the organization of local fruit wholesalers, a better offer, which effectively undersold the Provenzano brothers.

assassinate Hennessy.⁴⁸ The *Daily Picayune* did note in an 1890 article that non-Italians may have been responsible for killing Hennessy: “We have information to the effect that there is at hand evidence to show that the Hennessy murder was committed, if by Italians, at the instigation of persons outside that race”, however, this theory was never systematically investigated at the time.⁴⁹

As evidenced by the arrested individuals, the accused were not necessarily “un-embedded” within the local community; in fact, the alleged conspiracy to assassinate Chief Hennessey was believed to span the class structure of New Orleans’s Sicilian community. Members of the ethnic elite, Joseph Macheca (a local fruit wholesaler), Charles Matranga, Jim and John Caruso (foremen for Matranga), Charles Patorno (local merchant) were indicted on conspiracy charges that they “did feloniously and maliciously incite, move, procure, aid, counsel, hire and command” the killing of Hennessy.⁵⁰ Working-class individuals were also indicted on charges of shooting Hennessy or on suspicion of their participation in the conspiracy: Pietro

⁴⁸ With regards to who actually killed Hennessy, John Kendall wrote in 1939, “We never did get to know exactly who killed Hennessy” (“Who Killa de Chief?”, 530). Humbert Nelli later suggested that professional killers were responsible for Hennessy’s death, and that the Provenzanos possibly framed the Matrangas for Hennessy’s murder (*The Business of Crime: Italians and Syndicate Crime in the United States*, 59-61). Richard Gambino hypothesized that members of the white power structure in New Orleans used the incident to wrest control of the New Orleans docks away from the Matrangas and to take-over Italian-run commercial interests in the city. Ultimately, the lynching was a means of limiting the “position, participation, and possibilities” of the Italian community in New Orleans (*Vendetta*, x). John Baiamonte theorizes that Hennessy could have been killed by any number of the other enemies who he was investigating and that the Provenzano/Matranga case was just used to cover it up (“Who Killa de Chief Revisited: The Hennessey Assassination and Its Aftermath, 1890-1991,” 140). Ultimately, Baiamonte concludes, no definitive proof exists that Hennessy was killed by the Mafia or Italians or that the jury was actually bribed (Ibid., 146). My effort throughout is less about engaging with these questions of “who killa de chief.” Rather, I investigate the public discourse on Hennessy’s murder and the lynching of Italians in order to analyze how the lynching was generally discussed and understood at the time, regardless of which this narrative was the most “accurate.” I do share the opinion of revisionists like Gambino, Barbara Botein and Joseph Maselli with regards to their concession that if in fact Italians did assassinate Chief Hennessy, it remains unlikely that it was the same Italians who were arrested and lynched for the crime.

⁴⁹ “The Hennessy Murder and the Italians,” *Daily Picayune*, 9 November 1890; Baiamonte, “Who Killa de Chief Revisited: The Hennessey Assassination and Its Aftermath, 1890-1991,” 140.

⁵⁰ Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings*, 123.

Monasterio since the gunfire reportedly came from the direction of his home and a shoe print matching his was found at the scene of the crime; Antonio Scaffidi, on association, since it was his uncle's fruit stand where the assassination plot was supposedly hatched; Antonio Bagnetto, the night watchman at Scaffidi's fruit stand, was later absent from work and found with a loaded pistol; Antonio Marchesi, a fruit seller, and his son Gasperi were charged as accessories after being found with a suspicious amount of cash; Charles Pietzo, a grocer, because he was later seen with two guns and Pietro Natali, who had just arrived from Chicago in reportedly ill-fitting clothing, was dubbed a "suspicious character."⁵¹ The circumstantial evidence surrounding these arrests supports the contention that many of these Italians and Sicilians were not arrested because of their race or ethnicity, nor for their "outsider" status, since, for example, Joseph Macheca, a veteran of the Confederate army and recently appointed Bolivia's consul general in New Orleans, was one of the most well-known and well-respected members of New Orleans Sicilian community.⁵² However, their status as Italian or Sicilian rendered them more plausibly culpable, for example, Natali's Italian-ness and manner of dress marked him as "suspicious" and thus arrestable. In this regard, these events demonstrate that while Italians in New Orleans may have been at risk for arrest and while their Italian-ness may have

⁵¹ Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings*, chapter 11. Additionally indicted: Emmanuele Polizzi (a fruit peddler and former neighbor, Polizzi was known throughout the trial as the "fool" who allegedly confessed his participation in the conspiracy but whose competency to stand trial was also held in question), Salvatore Sinceri, Rocco Geraci, Frank Romero, Bastian Incardona, Loretto Comitz and Charles Traina.

⁵² Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings*, 44-45. Of note, Macheca had also led a band of Italians in the Battle of Liberty Place in 1874, an insurrection by the White League intent on overthrowing the Reconstruction government in Louisiana. He had additionally commandeered a band of Sicilians during the presidential campaign of Horatio Seymour-Francis P. Blair against Ulysses S. Grant in 1868, where his group known as "The Innocents" marched the streets armed with "sidearm, used to shoot any black man or boy they laid eyes on, and reputedly left a trail of bodies behind them every time they paraded" (Ibid.).

rendered them outside the native-born white mainstream, they were not arrested nor lynched *because* they were Italian.

When the jury handed down their not-guilty verdict on March 13, its foreman explained that after having been taken to the actual scene of the crime to evaluate the plausibility of eyewitness testimony, given the late hour of the attack and the distances required to positively identify the perpetrators, the lack of visibility was a key factor in finding “reasonable doubt.”⁵³ Highlighting the native-born community’s incredulous reaction to the verdict, accusations of Mafia interference and jury tampering and bribery erupted within in the New Orleans press, as the not-guilty verdict was taken as evidence of the failure of the court system and the citizens charged with upholding it.⁵⁴ The press accused the defendants of being “a gang of assassins who had escaped the penalty of their damnable crime by the bribery of a jury and the perjuring of hired witnesses” and suggested that it was “owing to the money and the machinations of the Mafia they were enabled to walk through our courts and laugh at justice.”⁵⁵ National interpretations of the verdict were similar and suggested that even though “everyone knew” that the Italians were guilty, jurors had been “terrorized” by the Mafia into acquitting.⁵⁶ As evidence that certain opinions considered this alleged bribery a distinct sign of Italian criminality, the *Daily States* went on to publish the names and home/business addresses of all the jury members.⁵⁷

⁵³ Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings*, 227; *Daily Picayune*, March 1891.

⁵⁴ Blaming the Mafia was in part an effort to salvage the sanctity of the law and the court system.

⁵⁵ “The Italian Government and The Assassins” and “The Mafia and its Friends,” *Daily States*, 16 March 1891.

⁵⁶ “What do the Italians Want?” *New York Times*, 16 March 1891; “The Lynching Justifiable,” *New York Times*, 17 March 1891.

⁵⁷ Wilds, *Afternoon Story*, 101.

The severity of the uproar increased, especially with regards to (mis)interpretations of the Italian response to the verdict: “Much boasting was indulged in by the Dagoes who largely congregate there...Joyous enthusiasm...which shows how little respect these people entertain for the country which gives them a home and prosperity, or its government which protects and shields them.”⁵⁸ In reality, the Italian community was preparing for the celebration of King Umberto of Italy’s birthday on March 14 and for the Sicilian celebration of St. Joseph’s Day on March 19. But, these national and cultural celebrations were instead interpreted as evidence of the Sicilian community’s unpatriotic roots and their willingness to celebrate injustice, thus marking the Italian community at large as suspect and signaling the extent to which they were unincorporated with the larger native-born community in New Orleans.⁵⁹ Consequently, on the morning following the verdict, a mob numbering in the tens of thousands gathered at Clay Statue “to take steps to remedy the failure of justice in the Hennessy Case.”⁶⁰ As the headlines proclaimed, they came “prepared for action.”⁶¹

Significantly, there is certain evidence to attest to the fact that the lynch mob was a diverse group of rich, poor, white and *black* participants. The *New Delta*, a rather unreliable New Orleans daily, reported that three blacks “dragged Bagnetto’s

⁵⁸ “A Shameful Demonstration. Insulting the Stars and Stripes,” *New Orleans Item*, 15 March 1891.

⁵⁹ While the lynching the following day was not directly reacting to these cultural celebrations, nor were the victims killed because of their participation here, these cultural displays certainly rendered the Italian community as outsiders, or “socially unembedded,” to underscore the call back to Bailly and Tolnay.

⁶⁰ *Daily Picayune*, *Times Democrat* and *New Delta*, 14 March 1891.

⁶¹ *Daily Picayune*, 14 March 1891.

bleeding body down the cobblestones of Orleans street by rope around his neck.”⁶²

Typical of news coverage of the time, no other newspaper reported the names or descriptions of the lynch mob participants, beyond the mob’s leaders. Therefore, while unable to definitely conclude that African Americans participated in the lynching, it does seem that the mob-mentality had spread across class and racial lines.

The *Times Democrat* offered the following description:

The scene in the immediate neighborhood of the Parish Prison when the vigilantes were at their terrible work was weird, incongruous, and in some cases incredible. At first the dwellers in that section of the city did not appear to grasp the awful nature of the tragedy that was about to be enacted. Men, women and little children stood on doorsteps and galleries watching the passing of the solemn procession, joking, laughing and cheering as though it had been a circus parade. Nearly every negro man or woman to be seen (and there were hundreds of them) wore a broad grin, while laboring men elbowed their way through the crowd shrieking and applauding as if wild with delight...The neutral ground was quickly swarming with humanity of varied colors and nationalities, high and low, rich and poor.⁶³

While unable to assess the accuracy of the above reports, it seems significant that New Orleanians perceived an element of African American participation and complicity in the lynching of Italians.⁶⁴

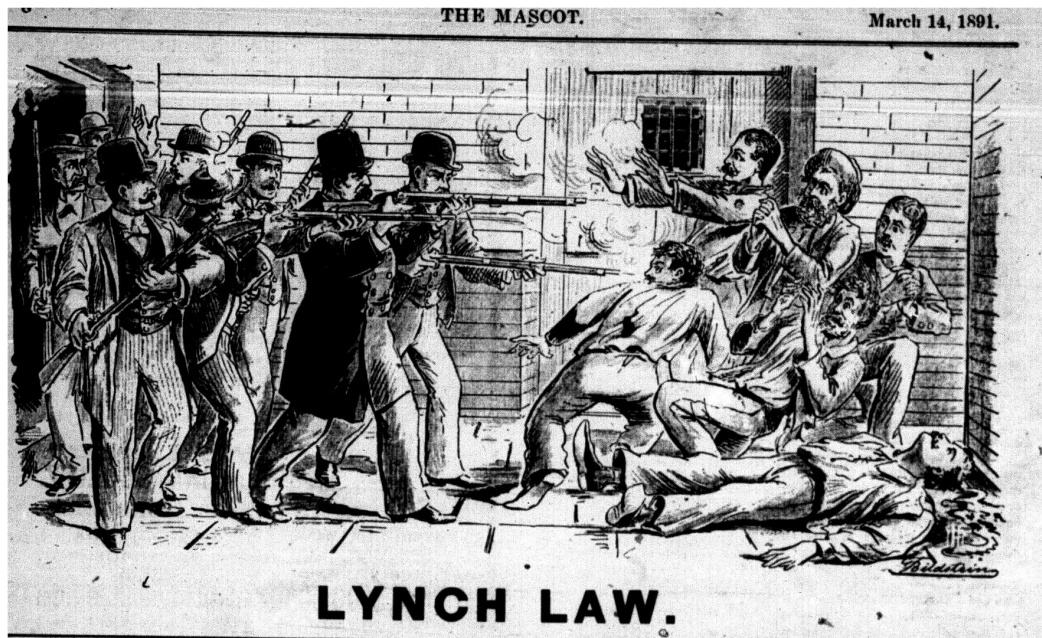
When the mob arrived at the Parish Prison, they burst through the barricaded doors—the ensuing violence, upon which this chapter began, resulted in the death of

⁶² Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings: The Murder of Chief Hennessy, the New Orleans “Mafia” Trials, and the Parish Prison Mob*, 277.

⁶³ *Times Democrat*, 15 March 1891. The *New York Times* offered a similar description of the interracial lynch mob.

⁶⁴ The possible African American presence and even participation at the lynching remains relevant since they were also participants in the “making of race” of Louisiana. In his analysis, Brundage notes rare cases of interracial lynch mobs and “occasional” endorsements of lynchings in the African American press. He argues that cases of black participation in lynch mobs offers evidence that lynchings were not always understood as “an inherent expression of racial repression” (*Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930*, 45-47). Yet, this conforms too closely to a binary assumption of race. In terms of the New Orleans case, the presumed criminality of Italians may have informed how African Americans racialized Italians, in their own right, as we cannot presume a minority solidarity.

eleven, arguably innocent, Sicilians. The headline in the *Daily States* the following day read, “Retribution! The Citizens Wipe Out in Blood the Blot on the City’s Scutcheon, and the Red-Handed Assassins of Our Chief of Police are Visited With Condign Death.”



In contrast with the secrecy and *extralegal* elements of “traditional” lynchings, the New Orleans event was organized by the city leaders, committed in broad daylight, a trial had already taken place, and the accused had been found innocent. Additionally, the victims were not, as Bailey and Tolnay argued, “easily identified as outsiders,” as the victims in this case were not “unfamiliar” to the native-born white community.⁶⁶ For example, Macheca, Patorno and Matranga represented members of the city’s fruit-importing elite, others, like, Bagnetto and Caruso, were either natural-

⁶⁵ *The Mascot*, 14 March 1891. *The Mascot*’s post lynching reporting suggests a critique of “lynch law,” as the unarmed and defenseless Italians were slaughtered by the armed mob.

⁶⁶ Bailey and Tolnay, *Lynched: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence*, 184.

born or naturalized U.S. citizens and had spent nearly their entire lives in New Orleans. Ultimately, their status as Italians/Sicilians made them outsiders, regardless of the extent to which they were in fact integrated in the social and economic workings of New Orleans. Additionally, in comparison with how and why Mexicans were lynched, several of the New Orleans victims appear to have been killed because of their geographic and personal proximity to other accused Sicilians.

Vicksburg, MS (1886)

Although the 1891 lynching was by far the largest and most well documented lynching of Italians/Sicilians, it was not the only act of vigilante violence against Italians/Sicilians in the Gulf South at the end of the nineteenth century. Reviewing these other cases offers insight into both the continuity of causes as well as the historical particularities behind these atypical lynchings. Take the case of Federico Villarosa, for example, who was ultimately killed in Vicksburg, MS on March 28, 1886. While conflicting explanations persist, at least several press accounts of the incident reported that Villarosa, an Italian fruit dealer who had resided in the city for at least four years, had “indecently” assaulted the ten-year old daughter of the presumably white postmaster.⁶⁷ According to the *Weekly Commercial Herald*, the victim “found herself in the grasp of the burley Italian who attempted to commit an

⁶⁷ “A Human Fiend,” *Weekly Commercial Herald*, 2 April 1886 (Vicksburg, MS); *Macon Beacon*, 3 April 1886. The *Macon Beacon* was a weekly paper from Macon in Noxubee County in east-central Mississippi; after the siege of Jackson, the state government relocated to Macon for the duration of the Civil War. The paper specialized in Civil War news, but added two columns, “News and Views from the State Column” and “Mississippi Happenings” after the war (Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*).

outrage upon her, language sufficiently strong to describe which could not be used in these columns, and his hellish purpose was only frustrated by the screams of the child attracting attention.”⁶⁸ A “negro boy” passing by rescued her and corroborated the account.

The *Weekly Commercial Herald* alleged that this was Villarosa’s third attempted assault and that he had previously served time in Baton Rouge for attempted rape—his previous two alleged victims were the daughter of a “worthy colored carpenter” and a “little negro girl about eleven years old.”⁶⁹ Notably, a lynch mob only set upon Villarosa after his assault crossed racial boundaries. The *Herald* explained that Villarosa did not deny committing the crime, and that “representatives of every nationality, race and color freely expressed an opinion that the course of law was too slow and tedious to deal with cases of this character.”⁷⁰ As a result, although Villarosa was removed to a neighboring town for “safe-keeping” and even though the sheriff dispersed an original lynch mob, Villarosa broke his leg trying to escape a second lynch mob, and, ultimately, the “scoundrel” was “severely dealt with.”⁷¹

However, such an accounting remains contrary to the correspondence from the Italian Ambassador Baron Fava to the U.S. Secretary of State. Fava admits that the alleged assault “arouses a feeling of horror in the minds of all right-thinking men”

⁶⁸ “A Human Fiend,” *Weekly Commercial Herald*, 2 April 1886 (Vicksburg, MS).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ “A Fearful Crime,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 March 1886 (Monroe, LA); “A Human Fiend,” *Weekly Commercial Herald*, 2 April 1886 (Vicksburg, MS).

⁷¹ *Macon Beacon*, 3 April 1886 (Macon, MS); “A Fearful Crime,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 March 1886 (Monroe, LA).

but that Villarosa was lynched on “mere suspicion” of the crime.⁷² According to the Consul’s report, “the unfortunate man had not really committed the crime with which he was charged.”⁷³ Was this a case of a mistaken assassination or an instance of diplomatic posturing? Upon a subsequent correspondence, Ambassador Fava thanked the Secretary of State for his commitment to investigating the “unjustifiable act committed... on the person Federico Villarosa,” which could lead us to conclude that Villarosa was in fact wrongfully accused and executed.⁷⁴ Unable to unequivocally conclude whether Villarosa was in fact guilty, perhaps a more revealing question: what made Villarosa accusable for this crime? Was it Villarosa’s Italian-ness that marked him as a plausible perpetrator?

This case is somewhat of an anomaly in comparison with other lynchings of Italians. Of those who were ultimately lynched in the Gulf South, this is the only case where an Italian was accused of a crime with “sexual overtones.”⁷⁵ Yet, inferring from the statistical evidence regarding the lynching of “white” men, as only four “white” men in Mississippi were lynched because of crimes with “sexual overtones,” it remains unlikely that Villarosa’s race marked him as a sexual predator.⁷⁶ Instead, more probably, Villarosa’s alleged sexual assaults of relatively young girls, not his race per se, marked him at risk for being lynched. Additionally, based on press

⁷² Ambassador Baron Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Thomas Bayard, 29 April 1886, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1725, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ambassador Baron Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Thomas Bayard, 9 May 1886, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1725, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

⁷⁵ This is one of the categories from the typology of crimes developed in Bailey and Tolnay, *Lynched: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence*.

⁷⁶ Statistics compiled from my own analysis of the raw lynching data from *Project HAL*.

reports that Villarosa served time in Baton Rouge and had only resided in Vicksburg for four years, it remains likely that Villasrosa was not a native to Vicksburg but a newer arrival. Such a demographic valuation would mark Villarosa as less socially-embedded in Vicksburg, thus in line with common assessments of why non-blacks were lynched.⁷⁷ Villarosa's Italian-ness, while mentioned in the press accountings, does not appear to be a factor in why he was considered plausibly culpable in this case. Whether or not Villarosa was wrongfully accused as Ambassador Fava claimed, his lynching appears to be grounded more in his personal reputation, the perceived atrocity of his purported crimes and his particular living pattern, rather than because of a proclivity associated with his race or ethnicity.

Dago Joe & Shelby Depot, MS (1887)

While Villarosa may not have been lynched because of a perceived correlation between his Italian-ness and a tendency towards criminal transgressions, public discourse in the Gulf South was certainly beginning to observe a link between Italian-ness and (non-sexual) criminality. The lynching of "Dago Joe" of June 11, 1887 in Shelby Depot, MS serves to both highlight and problematize this developing association.⁷⁸ Throughout the late spring of 1887, local newspapers reported on the latest news concerning "the dago who killed young Mr. Walter Haynes."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Bailey and Tolnay, *Lynched: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence*.

⁷⁸ Recall from the discussion in Chapter 1, "dago" was not necessarily a pejorative term but was often used as a neutral moniker.

⁷⁹ *Greenville Times*, 28 May 1887. The *Greenville Times* was a local weekly from Washington County, Mississippi; of note, 33% of Greenville's population died in the 1878 yellow fever epidemic, which had

Apparently, “Dago Joe” shot a killed a white “youth...without provocation,” at which point, a statewide manhunt ensued.⁸⁰ The *Greenville Times* reported on various attempts to capture the “dago,” including one instant where a local citizen shot himself in the foot “endeavoring to creep up on him.”⁸¹ By June, the *Daily Picayune* reported that the “murderer” by the name of “Dago Joe” had been lynched: “From last reports Dago Joe was still swinging.”⁸²

It turns out, however, despite his moniker and despite the fact that “Dago Joe” is included within current tabulations of Sicilian lynchings, “Dago Joe,” may not have actually been Italian or Sicilian.⁸³ Historian Clive Webb’s chapter on the lynchings of Sicilians in the American South, which provides the only comprehensive accounting of the causes and motives behind the lynchings of Sicilians, includes a valuable table of Sicilian lynching victims in the American South between 1886-1910.⁸⁴ However, while I concur with Webb’s overall claim about the economic motive of these lynchings, I posit a revision that “Dago Joe” cannot be unequivocally included within this compilation of Sicilian lynchings.

Webb provides two citations for his claim that Dago Joe was of Sicilian origin—a *New York Times* article and an article from the *Memphis Avalanche*, both

traveled up from New Orleans along the Mississippi River (Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*).

⁸⁰ *Daily Advocate*, 15 June 1887. (Baton Rouge, LA)

⁸¹ *Greenville Times*, 4 June 1887; *Greenville Times*, 11 June 1887. (Washington County, MS) It appears that Geo. Ames, who shot himself in the foot, was “creeping up on the wrong person,” since “Dago Joe” was captured elsewhere in the state that same day.

⁸² “Greenville,” *Daily Picayune*, 14 June 1887.

⁸³ Webb, “The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886-1910,” 176. Of note, Webb does confirm that Shelby Depot has not yet been included within any study of Sicilian lynchings in the South (Ibid., 177).

⁸⁴ In compiling this table, he credits a comprehensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources and lynching statistics compiled by the Tuskegee Institute and the NAACP.

dated 14 June 1887. The *New York Times* proclaimed, Dago Joe was a “half-breed...son of a Sicilian father and mulatto mother, and had the worst characteristics of both races in his make-up. He was cunning, treacherous, and cruel, and was regarded in the community where he lived as an assassin by nature.”⁸⁵ According to Webb’s reading of these sources, Dago Joe was at least half-Sicilian and that Joe’s lynching was predicated, in part, on his Sicilian-ness. However, Webb’s citations do not seem to represent the dominant readings and assessments of “Dago Joe’s” racial identity.

In my consultation of contemporary press reports of “Dago Joe’s” lynching, I found that Joe was more commonly described as a “negro,” “a young half breed” and a “colored man.”⁸⁶ In one case, the *Memphis Appeal* branded Joe as a “desperate half-breed between negro and creole.”⁸⁷ The *Memphis Appeal* continued, “Dago is well known on the river from New Orleans to Cairo as a desperate character, evil and treacherous as half breeds generally are.”⁸⁸ Additionally, the *Daily Picayune* went on to report that local “negroes [were] raising some trouble about the lynching” and were threatening to kill the group of men responsible for guarding Joe.⁸⁹ While only a small sampling exists, across the dozen articles I reviewed that made reference to

⁸⁵ “Lynched by a Mob,” *New York Times*, 14 June 1887. While I have not been able to consult the *Memphis Avalanche*, upon review of the *New York Times*, this may in fact be a duplicate article since the quotation that Webb attributes to the *Memphis Avalanche* was also in the *New York Times* article.

⁸⁶ “Greenville,” *Daily Picayune*, 14 June 1887; *Daily Advocate*, 15 June 1887 (Baton Rouge, LA); *Huntsville Gazette*, 18 June 1887. (Huntsville, AL)

⁸⁷ “A Murderer Captured,” *Memphis Appeal*, 7 June 1887

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Daily Picayune*, 8 July 1887. As the *Picayune* warned, “Should the negroes attempt this, the citizens of Australia, [Miss] have ordered a lot of Winchester rifles and will be prepared” (*Ibid.*). All that being said, I cannot definitively conclude that the Italian community did not come to the defense of Dago Joe, only that the African American community did assemble on his behalf.

“Dago Joe,” the *New York Times* piece was the only article that laid claim to Joe’s Sicilian origins.⁹⁰ In this regard, why was a plausibly non-Italian dubbed a “dago”?

By no means a comprehensive documentation of this occurrence, the lynching of “Dago Joe” is the only case I have come across where “dago” was used to describe someone who was black and not necessarily Italian. Several possibilities exist for this discursive flexibility—firstly, “Dago Joe” could have been, given his characterization as a “half-breed,” part Italian or Sicilian. However, since the local black community in Australia, Mississippi rose to Joe’s defense, it seems less likely that Joe lived among the Italian or “dago” community or necessarily identified with his Italian heritage. If not Italian, what then did “dago” mean in this context? The “dago” moniker appears to be employed, at least in 1887 Mississippi, as a pejorative synonym for criminal. Even without knowing enough about Joe’s living history to draw a definitive conclusion regarding his “social embeddedness,” Joe appeared to possess a particular reputation within the community. Ultimately, his background as a “half-breed” may have marked him as capable of criminal activity, but his Sicilian-ness does not appear to be a stated cause for his lynching. Italian or Sicilian-ness, then, was less important than an invocation of a label that helped to establish a victim’s outsider-status, which speaks to the discursive construction of identity used to legitimate violence.

⁹⁰ The following articles categorized Joe as either a “colored man” or a “half-breed”: *Memphis Appeal*, 9 June 1887; “A Mississippi Lynching,” *Fort Worth Daily Gazette*, 14 June 1887 (Fort Worth, TX); “Lynching a Boy’s Murderer,” *New York Sun*, 14 June 1887; *Milan (TN) Exchange*, 18 June 1887.

Hahnville, LA (1896)

On August 9, 1896, three Sicilians were lynched in Hahnville, Louisiana in St. Charles Parish. Lorenzo Saladino, a thirty-six year-old native of Campo Fiorito, was accused of killing Jules Gueymard, a wealthy white planter and merchant. Initially, “St. Charles decid[ed] against a lynching” and despite Saladino’s “red and ill-looking countenance” that demonstrated his “inborn brutality,” it appeared as though the case would go to trial.⁹¹ In fact, the press reported that citizens in the area were collecting a “fund to aid in the prosecution.”⁹² Regardless, “Judge Lynch” ultimately won out. In addition to Saladino, Salvatore Arena and Giuseppe Venturella, two other Sicilians who happened to have been imprisoned at the same time on account of killing an old Spaniard in a “cowardly way” with whom they had competed for control over the “moss gathering” trade, were also lynched.⁹³

The *Daily Picayune* reported that the lynching was the result of a “mafia conspiracy,” that the victims “deserved their fate,” and that, “the Italian Government should know that the lynching of a few Italians in various parts of the United States is directly due to the practice of cowardly assassination which some of the Italians

⁹¹ “St. Charles Decides Against a Lynching,” *Daily Picayune*, 7 August 1896.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ “The Triple Lynching in St. Charles Parish,” *Daily Picayune*, 10 August 1896; “The Italian Lynching,” *Daily Picayune*, 14 April 1897; Ambassador Baron Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Richard Olney, 19 August 1896, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1729, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota. See also Margavio and Salomone. Significantly, sources report that African Americans in the community attended the burial of the Italian lynching victims (Scarpaci, “Walking the Color Line,” 67; see also Cunningham, “The Italian, a Hindrance to White Solidarity in Louisiana, 1890-1898”). This suggests that within certain communities, Italians and African Americans maintained at least friendly, and sometimes even intimate, ties; I elaborate upon this point in my chapter on miscegenation laws.

resort to so often.”⁹⁴ The *Picayune* justified the lynching as a means of “teach[ing] the lawless Italians a salutary lesson.”⁹⁵ On these grounds, the lynching was described as the very embodiment of justice against “high-handed murderers” and the result of a “defective and inefficient administration of the law.”⁹⁶ It should be mentioned that later in the month, a notorious New Orleans criminal came forward and claimed responsibility for the killing of the Spaniard Don Rexino, thus suggesting the actual innocence of at least two of the lynched Sicilians.⁹⁷ As the *Daily Picayune* explained, “The murderous negro wretch Antoine Richard, otherwise known as the ‘Creole’ ... [admitted] that the murder was committed by ... himself.”⁹⁸

Consistent with previous accountings of non-black lynchings where victims generally lacked a certain degree of social embeddedness—local press accounts originally misidentified the victims, thus suggesting that Arena and Venturella were not widely known within the community where they were killed.⁹⁹ Moreover, the Hahnville case, more so than either Vicksburg or Shelby Depot, offers clear evidence

⁹⁴ “The Triple Lynching in St. Charles Parish,” *Daily Picayune*, 10 August 1896; “The Italian Lynching,” *Daily Picayune*, 12 August 1896.

⁹⁵ *Daily Picayune*, 9 August 1896, as quoted in Webb, “The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886-1910,” 183.

⁹⁶ *Colfax Chronicle*, 22 August 1896, a Democratic paper that advocated for progressive and populist agricultural issues. The paper was located in Grant Parish (northern Louisiana), home of the Colfax Massacre in 1873 where 125 African Americans were killed. See also “The Italians and the Mafia,” *Daily Picayune*, 28 August 1897.

⁹⁷ “The Italians and the Mafia,” *Daily Picayune*, 28 August 1897. This both compares and contrasts with the incidence of lynchings of Mexicans. Like the three victims in Hahnville, Mexicans were often wrongly blamed for crimes they did not commit. However, in contrast to the Mexican experience where “the true story emerged so quickly and that details of the error were published” (Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence against Mexicans in the United States, 1848-1928*, 59), I offer the only secondary account of the “true story” that confirms the innocence of the Hahnville victims.

⁹⁸ “The Italians and the Mafia,” *Daily Picayune*, 28 August 1897. Of note, very little has been written on the Hahnville lynching; in fact, I have only seen Antoine Richard referenced in these primary sources, rather than any secondary material.

⁹⁹ According to diplomatic correspondence, the local press originally identified the victims as Decino Sorcoro and Angelo Marcuso (Ambassador Baron Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Richard Olney, 19 August 1896, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1729, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota).

of the Sicilian susceptibility to being lynched. Later exonerated by Richard's confession, Arena and Venturella appear to have been killed for a crime they did not in fact commit; yet their Sicilian-ness marked them as plausibly criminal and available for lynching by association with Salandino. As other scholars have noted, Sicilians who were lynched were almost always killed in "multiple lynchings" because of the growing assumptions that linked Sicilian-ness and "criminal conspiracy."¹⁰⁰ The explicit references here to the alleged "mafia conspiracy," although there does not appear to be any evidence to suggest that an actual conspiracy existed between the three victims, suggest that Arena and Venturella were lynched because of a presumption regarding their ethnicity.¹⁰¹

Tallulah, LA (1899)

In July of 1899, the trouble in Tallulah, Louisiana began over a goat. The surrounding area of Madison Parish was home to several thousand African Americans, several hundred whites and six Sicilians, three of whom were the DiFatta brothers. The DiFatta brothers owned two grocery stores in Tallulah; because of their success, certain members of the community allegedly "regarded [them] with secret animosity."¹⁰² Accounts vary, but Dr. J. Ford Hodge reportedly shot one of Francesco DiFatta's goats, which had repeatedly wandered onto his property; DiFatta and Hodge

¹⁰⁰ Webb, "The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886-1910," 183.

¹⁰¹ The Hahnville case also provides tremendous insight into the post-lynching debate regarding the citizenship status of the three victims, which I discussed in the previous chapter.

¹⁰² Report by the Secretary of the Royal Embassy at Washington Camillo Romano, 1 August 1899, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1739, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

quarreled but with “no serious consequences.”¹⁰³ In an encounter later that day, DiFatta’s brother Carlo “spoke harshly” with Dr. Hodge and even struck the doctor, at which point Hodge fired his pistol at Carlo; Giuseppe, the third DiFatta, witnessed the fray from the balcony of their house. Rushing to his brother’s defense, Giuseppe fired upon Dr. Hodge with a pistol loaded with birdshot—word spread quickly through the town that “the Italians had killed Dr. Hodge.”¹⁰⁴ Later described as a premeditated act of homicide, the *Times Democrat* reported that Dr. Hodge was shot 50-75 times. The *Arkansas Gazette* ran the subsequent headline, “Prominent Physician of the Town Had Been Shot Down by the Foreigners in Cold Blood.”¹⁰⁵ Supposedly in cahoots with the “cold-blooded foreigners,” Giovanni Cerami and Rosario Fiducia, two Sicilian friends of the DeFatta brothers were also rounded up on charges of conspiracy.¹⁰⁶

After constructing a makeshift gallows from “a device used to hoist dead cattle for skinning,” the lynch mob made three separate trips to the jail and committed three separate lynchings of the five Sicilians in order to enact “vengeance upon the guilty” and to “teach the Italian and his gang a lesson.”¹⁰⁷ The *Weekly Messenger* went on to describe the shooting of Hodge, not the lynching, as a “tragic” and

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ “Hung Five,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 23 July 1899.

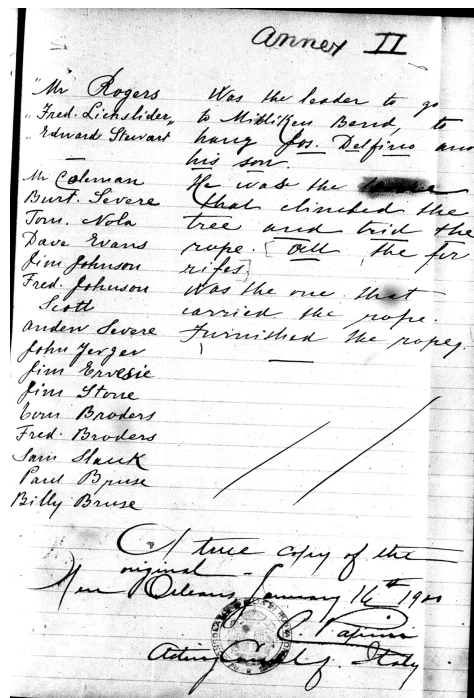
¹⁰⁶ *Times Democrat*, 21 July 1899.

¹⁰⁷ *Weekly Messenger*, 29 July 1899. (St. Martinsville, Louisiana) See also Haas, “Guns, Goats, and Italians: The Tallulah Lynching of 1899.”

“dastardly” event.¹⁰⁸ It should also be noted that Dr. Hodge survived the shooting and was declared “out of all danger” three days later.¹⁰⁹

Inhabitants of Madison Parish issued “a pronouncement to the effect that all others of the race within the parish lines had three days to leave under penalty of death.”¹¹⁰ The *Times-Democrat* disputed this claim by saying, “There may have been some talk about running all the Italians out, but the order was not needed.”¹¹¹

Arguably, the order “was not needed,” because the parish had already been cleared of Sicilians. Whether or not a proclamation was issued, the two remaining Sicilians reportedly fled from Tallulah, at which point newspaper reports claimed that Tallulah had “emptied their town of Italians.”¹¹² Despite the fact that the members of the lynch mob were well known in the community, and two “Negro brothers” who witnessed the lynching even



¹⁰⁸ *Weekly Messenger*, 29 July 1899. (St. Martinsville, Louisiana)

¹⁰⁹ “Tallulah Lynching,” *Times Democrat*, 22 July 1899.

¹¹⁰ “Tallulah Lynching. Italians Had Planned a Plot to Murder. Conspiracy Clearly Shown by the Trend of Events. The Dead Men All Had Blackened Records. One of the Remaining Italians Left the Parish Hurriedly,” *Times Democrat*, 22 July 1899. Perhaps in anticipation of impending international attention, the regional press appeared to deny the validity of such claims that Italians were forced out of Tallulah.

¹¹¹ “Tallulah Lynching,” *Times Democrat*, 22 July 1899.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

provided a list of names to the Italian diplomatic investigators, the Madison Parish Grand Jury concluded that they were “wholly unable to discover the names of the perpetrators of the lynching.”¹¹³

Characterizations of the victims remain inconsistent. Perhaps as a means to justify the lynching, certain press reports described the accused as having “fierce and quarrelsome dispositions” and “reputations of being bad and violent men, easily excited—thrown into a perfect furry [sic] at the least cause.”¹¹⁴ Another suggested that because of their “bad reputations...no one seemed to have any sympathy for the dead men for there had evidently been no love lost between them and the other inhabitants of the place.”¹¹⁵ Additionally, their successful grocery businesses marked the DiFatta brothers as potential threats to certain members of the Tallulah community, which required them to be rendered as disreputable residents. Alternatively, diplomatic correspondence noted, “As to the good conduct of the persons lynching, nothing could be said against them; they never had difficulty with

¹¹³ Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State John Hay, 15 January 1900, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1739, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota; G.C. Vinci Letter to U.S. Secretary of State John Hay, 25 July 1899, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1739, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota. The image on the previous page shows the list of names given to the Italian diplomatic investigators (“List of the Lynchers,” Report from Acting Italian Consul at New Orleans to the Royal Ambassador at Washington, 13 January 1900, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1739, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota). Francesco had employed one of the African American witnesses, Joe Evans, for at least two years. The other witness, Evans’s “Negro brother,” had since been murdered “either on suspicion, or because he had talked too much about the lynchers” (Fava Letter to U.S. Secretary of State John Hay, 15 January 1900, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1739, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota).

¹¹⁴ “Lynching of Sicilians at Tallulah,” *Daily Picayune*, 22 July 1899; *Daily States*, 22 July 1899.

¹¹⁵ “Five Italians Lynched,” *Times Democrat*, 22 July 1899.

any one.”¹¹⁶ Continuing in their assessment, the diplomatic report explained that, “the behavior of these men had always been good, and, although they were of vivacious temperament, they had never had any difficulty with any one during the four years that they had resided in the village.”¹¹⁷

More in line with several of the victims in the New Orleans lynching, the Tallulah victims appear to have enjoyed a greater degree of “social embeddedness” within the community. Diplomatic records report that the DiFatta brothers retained a certain amount of “popularity especially Francesco, who frequently associated with the most prominent persons of the neighborhood and drank and played cards with them.”¹¹⁸ Furthermore, at least one source reported that the DiFatta brothers had lived in the area for at least six years, while Doctor Hodge had only resided in Madison Parish for a year and a half.¹¹⁹ This suggests that Francesco DiFatta was not necessarily lynched because of his exceptionality or outsider status; on the contrary, he appears to have been a recognized participant within the business community. His Sicilian-ness, however, rendered him lynchable. The behavior of the DiFatta brothers in their interaction with Dr. Hodge, more legally recognizable as self-defense, was not criminal in and of itself; however, their actions became criminal, their right to defend themselves overlooked, because of their Sicilian-ness and the fact that they had overstepped their place. Furthermore, like two of the victims in Hahnville,

¹¹⁶ Report by the Secretary of the Royal Embassy at Washington Camillo Romano, 1 August 1899, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1739, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ “The Tallulah Tragedy,” *Daily Picayune*, 24 July 1899.

Cerami and Fiducia were lynched not for having participated in the attack on Dr. Hodge itself but, explicitly and by ethnic association, being the “wrong” ethnicity in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In spite of the particularities of each incident, the various lynchings discussed here resulted from a continuity of causes. While race and ethnicity marked Italians/Sicilians at risk for being lynched, such prejudice was ground in economic competition.¹²⁰ Historian Stefano Luconi’s innovative reassessment of Italian lynching victims takes this argument one step further, as he contends that Italians “were lynched not only because their membership in the white race was usually challenged at that time, but also as a consequence of economic, political and labor rivalries that exploited the newcomers’ dubious racial status.”¹²¹ This emphasis upon “exploitation” suggests that beyond the common assumption that Italians were lynched because of their “racial ambiguity,” the racialized stereotype actually served as a “smokescreen that masked other kinds of rivalries and antagonism.”¹²² In his assessment of the 1910 lynching of two Italians in Tampa, Luconi notes that this particular lynching was actually motivated by labor-related causes and was intended to intimidate striking workers; race was only indirectly related and used as justification for lynching retribution.

¹²⁰ Recall, as previously cited, Webb argued that these lynchings were motivated by “economic competition rooted in racial prejudice” (“The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886-1910,” 178 and 187).

¹²¹ Stefano Luconi, “The Lynching of Italian Americans: A Reassessment,” ed. Alan J Gravano, Ilaria Serra, and American Italian Historical Association (New York: John D. Calandra Italian-American Institute, 2013), 58.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 78.

Such a discursive pattern repeats, whereby post-lynching press accountings utilized an explicitly racialized discourse to justify killings that may have been additionally motivated by economic competition. Take the Tallulah case, for example—the DiFatta brothers, having lived in Madison Parish for at least six years, operated two successful groceries in the area. This is not to say that Dr. Hodge was necessarily in any sort of direct competition with the DiFatta brothers or that there was any kind of conspiracy at play, but why were the townspeople so quick to form a lynch mob when Dr. Hodge’s wounds were not in fact life threatening and he reportedly made a full recovery within days? Perhaps the lynch mob, as the press would later recount, took this dispute as an opportunity to “dispose of the Italians who had lived in their midst.”¹²³ The fact that residents in Madison Parish allegedly ordered the expulsion of the remaining Italians from the parish following the lynchings remains in line with this interpretation.

Significantly, the justification for the lynching was ground in explicitly racial terms. The *Times Democrat* claimed that the lynching was not in fact ground in any sort of “race prejudice”: “The same punishment would have been vented upon any set of men, no matter whether they were Italians, Englishmen, Germans or natives of the United States. It was the crime which had been punished, not the fact that the criminals belonged to any particular race.”¹²⁴ Yet, the piece was entitled, “Citizens Plead Necessity For White Supremacy.” Despite protestations to the contrary, invoking a justification for the lynching on the grounds that it was necessary for

¹²³ “Tallulah Lynching,” *Times Democrat*, 22 July 1899.

¹²⁴ “Citizens Plead Necessity For White Supremacy,” *Times Democrat*, 25 July 1899.

“white supremacy” remains both problematic and telling. As the *Times* explains, “The citizens of Tallulah stand shoulder to shoulder in saying that they were obliged to take the step they did. They argue that while complicity in the conspiracy was shown on the part of the five Italians to their satisfaction, it could never have been proven legally, and that to insure white supremacy, no other course was possible than the course pursued.”¹²⁵ Thus comparing the motives behind the lynching of Sicilians with those motivations behind the lynchings of African Americans and suggesting that “white supremacy” would otherwise be in jeopardy indicates that Italians could be, when necessary, consigned outside a larger category of whiteness. In this particular moment, relegating Italians outside of “whiteness,” confirming their racial transiency, serves as a discursive means to validate the lynching and to insure the legitimacy of violence that would otherwise undermine white/nativist respectability.

What remains additionally remarkable about the lynchings of Sicilians in the Gulf South is the fact that, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Italians and Sicilians had enjoyed a relatively sanguine relationship with the native-born white population in the 1870s and 1880s. However, while the result of larger, long-building factors (such as a growing concern over Italian/Sicilian economic competition, resentment over their success, ambivalence regarding their intermingling with African Americans, etc.), a rhetorical shift and surge in the virulence of anti-Italian rhetoric

¹²⁵ Ibid. The quotation continues, “In Madison Parish...few white men are dominated by the belief that it is incumbent upon them to act quickly in any emergency, and to stamp out any tendency toward lawlessness in the bud, no matter at what cost. There have been several lynchings in the past eighteen months, none of which have found their way into print heretofore...In every instance the judgment of the mob has been sustained by the people, and the result is that Madison parish is never the scent now of any race troubles. The negroes have come to the realization of the fact that lawlessness on their part will not be tolerated.”

was most immediately evident within the aftermath of the lynchings in the 1890s. Take the New Orleans case, for example, as discursive attitudes towards Sicilians began to harden in the aftermath of Police Chief David Hennessy's murder, ensuing trial and subsequent lynching.

Initially after Hennessy's murder, the *Daily Picayune* still differentiated between New Orleans's Italian community and the criminal element.¹²⁶ The *Daily Picayune* continued to reference Italians as "our fellow citizens" and urged the city against "anti-Dago" action.¹²⁷ New Orleanians were reminded that Italians possessed "honesty, probity, public spirit, patriotism and useful citizenship."¹²⁸ Furthermore, New Orleanians still publically recognized "the obligation due [to] the Italians" and credited the community with developing the region's fruit industry and contributing to the region's commercial prosperity.¹²⁹ Even in the aftermath of the lynching, echoes of these proclamations noted, "Some of the most respectable, orderly, order-loving and law abiding people in this city are Italians."¹³⁰ At the time, the New Orleans press still attempted to differentiate between the "law-abiding" Italians and the criminals. Yet, in contrast to descriptions from the 1880s, rhetoric in the aftermath

¹²⁶ "Our Italian Fellow-Citizens," *Daily Picayune*, 17 October 1890. In fact, when City Hall appointed a civil group to form the Committee of Fifty to aid in the investigation of Hennessy's shooting, the local press was wary that such meetings would turn into a lynch mob. While the *Daily Picayune* reported after the first meeting that the crowd of several thousands represented an "excellent class of citizens," they did note that the Committee seemed to be asking permission to possibly adopt "extra judicial and unlawful methods" in the future. The paper dismissed the plausibility of interpreting the Committee's report in such a manner by saying, "The idea of a 'vigilance' organization, committed to lynch law, holding its sessions in the Council Chamber at City Hall would be truly anomalous" (28 October 1890).

¹²⁷ "Our Italian Fellow-Citizens," *Daily Picayune*, 17 October 1890. For the subsequent quotation, see "The Italian Colony," *Daily Picayune*, 2 November 1890.

¹²⁸ "Our Italian Fellow Citizens," *Daily Picayune*, 17 October 1890.

¹²⁹ "The Hennessy Murder and the Italians," *Daily Picayune*, 9 November 1890.

¹³⁰ "The Italian Citizen and the Mafia," *Daily Picayune*, 20 March 1891. See also "Responsible Italians," *Daily States*, 14 March 1891.

of Hennessy's murder began to include elements that spoke more directly to anxieties about Italians' potential for criminal activity. In this regard, the racialization of Italians was more an after effect of the violence, rather than its cause.

As the trial ran its course, certain voices from the New Orleans press began to emphasize the negative potential in these arriving Italians, since "many of them are criminals" and "paupers."¹³¹ The tone of the *Times Democrat* described the accused with a clearly derogatory slant: "The little jail was crowded with Sicilians, whose low, repulsive countenances, and slavery attire, proclaimed their brutal natures... They were as dumb as clams."¹³² The comparison to "slavery attire" especially telling, such rhetoric rendered the jailed Sicilians categorically outside the native-born white mainstream community. In contrast to descriptions from the 1880s, rhetoric began to more noticeably associate Italians with criminal activity; as a debate within the New Orleans press ensued, both anxieties and discourse progressively intensified.¹³³

Around the country, Italian-language newspapers like *Il Progresso* and *Cristoforo Colombo* in New York printed daily accounts of the collections they were raising for the defense funds of the accused New Orleanian Italians.¹³⁴ The perception

¹³¹ "Italian Immigrants," *Daily Picayune*, 17 October 1890.

¹³² *Times Democrat*, 17 October 1890.

¹³³ The intense publicity surrounding the murder and motivation behind the accompanying discursive shift may be partially explained because of the nature of the victim, who was not just a member of law enforcement, but the chief of police. As John Dittmer argues, the killing of a police officer in the South, someone considered to be the "defender of the caste system," could have been literally interpreted as an attack upon the region's racial order (*Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 139). This may have influenced Southerners, who already read African Americans as innately criminal, to apply a similar (and extant) logic to Italians.

¹³⁴ See March 1891 issues of *Il Progresso* and *Cristoforo Colombo*. According to *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers* (Library of Congress), *Il Progresso* (1880-1989) was the first Italian language newspaper in the United States. Similarly, the Italian community in Nevada expressed indignation against

of such Italian solidarity contributed to a growing divide between Italian and native-born communities in New Orleans, as New Orleanian discourse began to more unequivocally collapse Italian criminality with the Italian community at large. Just a week before the lynching, the *Daily States* reported:

Our gates are open to all who seek entrance, conditioned only upon their becoming Americans in the truest sense of the terms when they cast their lot among us. One—the chiefest danger to our social system—is that of engrafting upon its stem the vagaries of other nationalities. Unfortunately, the most inconsiderate of these we have found to be the Sicilian. In numbers they are a dangerous proportion among us. No people, probably by instinct and education are more foreign to American ideas than they. Generation after generation they live among us and to the last they remain Sicilian still...Few among them are producers. They rarely follow laborious occupations...one can suspect that therefore, the majority who seek our shores are of the criminal class.¹³⁵

No longer were Italians well-meaning and contributing citizens in New Orleans.

Sicilians were now described as the most “inconsiderate” and resistant to “becoming American,” and the most criminal among immigrant groups.

the New Orleans authorities, while adamantly differentiating between the Mafia and Italians in general (“The Hennessy Case Abroad,” *Daily Picayune*, 3 December 1890).

¹³⁵ “The Hennessy Assassination,” *Daily States*, 4 March 1891. Although the *Daily States* had originally maintained the pretense of objectivity, by March, the editor’s vituperation demonstrated the extent that he had infused his personal (racial) biases into his editorial (Wilds, *Afternoon Story*, 95).



In the aftermath of the lynching, while some papers like *The Mascot* were more sympathetic to the lynching victims, by and large, the New Orleans press justified the lynching because of what they

explained as a presumed criminal element present within the “race” at large.¹³⁶ The press described the Italians as “undoubtedly guilty” since the victims were “assassins,” “criminals,” and members of the “Mafia.”¹³⁷ Such arguments claimed that the lynchings resulted from a need for self-defense: “The safety of our citizens was menaced and the peace of the great city of New Orleans was in the hands of a gang of murders—when justice fails the responsibility falls into the hands of the people, and it becomes their duty to establish law and order and the safety of themselves.”¹³⁸ Despite varying degrees of animosity, the New Orleans press at large, including the *Daily Picayune*, condoned the lynching.

¹³⁶ Only *The Mascot* came out against the lynching, although their critique had more to do with their disparagement of specific members of the lynch mob and less to do with their sympathy for Italians (Wilds, *Afternoon Story*, 104). The image on the left, which included the caption, “A Bad Easter Egg. The Bloodiest Carnival and Lent in the State of Louisiana,” was taken from *The Mascot*, 29 March 1891. *The Mascot* was similarly critical of the lynching in its subsequent issues.

¹³⁷ See March 1891 issues of *Daily Picayune*, *Times Democrat*. See also, “The Lynchers Justified: Report of the Grand Jury of New Orleans,” *Daily Picayune*, 6 May 1891. Similar sentiment may be seen elsewhere in the *New York Times*: “The New Orleans Affair,” *New York Times*, 16 March 1891; “The Lynching Justifiable,” *New York Times*, 17 March 1891; “Lynch Law and the Mafia,” *New York Times*, 17 March 1891; “Sharp Words by Judge Cowing,” *New York Times*, 17 March 1891.

¹³⁸ *Weekly Messenger*, 21 March 1891. (St. Martinsville, Louisiana)

To be clear, the anti-Italian rhetoric espoused within the pages of the New Orleans press was not entirely new, but it did represent a discursive shift regarding how Italians were written about in New Orleans. As discussed in the previous chapter, an available anti-Italian rhetoric existed and was readily utilized to discuss Italians within northern newspapers. In order to explain the lynching in publically consumable terms, the New Orleans press adopted this available (northern) anti-Italian discourse. Despite the particularities of the victims, at least several of whom were well-integrated into the social and economic domains of New Orleans, such rhetoric rendered the lynching victims as “outsiders.” By subverting their social embeddedness and community connectedness, the Italian victims were thus marked as justifiably lynched. The very fact that discourse could validate an otherwise racialized form of punishment offers further evidence of the racial transiency of Italians within the Gulf South social order.

Erwin, MS (1901)

The lynching in 1901 Erwin, MS departs from the pattern of previous lynchings discussed and offers evidence to support the contention that Sicilians contributed to a restructuring of racial constituents in the Gulf South. On July 11, 1901, a mob in Erwin, Mississippi attacked a group of four Sicilians—father and son Giovanni and Vincenzo Serio, natives of Cefalu, were “shot to death,” Salvatore

Liberto took a bullet to the groin, while a fourth escaped unhurt.¹³⁹ Months earlier, Vincenzo, 29, quarreled with an “American citizen” over a horse.¹⁴⁰ Wounded by a mob of armed men, Vincenzo escaped to nearby Greenville but later returned to rejoin his father. Certain details remain inconsistent—according to Signor Carignani, the Italian Chargé d’Affaires of His Majesty, after being debriefed by the Italian Consulate in New Orleans, “No secret was made of the preparations for the lynching” and that “citizens [had] ordered [Vincenzo] to leave the village within thirty days.”¹⁴¹ Yet, according to press accountings of the incident, although the group had been warned to leave the neighborhood, they returned because they were told that the “trouble had blown over and that they would not be molested.”¹⁴² Either way, it appears and Vincenzo and his party were not “suspecting danger,” as the Sicilians went to sleep that night in hammocks hung in the gallery of their home; after midnight, a “volley of rifle and pistol bullets were poured into them.”¹⁴³

Unlike previous lynchings, press reporting of and public reaction to the Erwin incident employed an altered tone.¹⁴⁴ Both *The Shreveport Caucasian* and *The*

¹³⁹ “Italians Killed,” *The Caucasian*, 14 July 1901. (Shreveport, LA) While one newspaper called the Serios brothers, the legation documents refer to them as father/son; I will thus consider this a father/son duo.

¹⁴⁰ Signor Carignani (The Chargé d’Affaires of His Majesty) Letter to Acting U.S. Secretary of State, 24 July 1901, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1726, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota. According to historian Clive Webb, this was the inciting incident for the lynching: Vincenzo Serio “became embroiled in a dispute over a horse. When he refused a demand to leave town, a mob turned not only on him but two other Sicilians, wounding one and murdering the other” (Webb, “The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886-1910,” 183). However, the primary sources appear to relate a more protracted conflict.

¹⁴¹ Signor Carignani (The Chargé d’Affaires of His Majesty) Letter to Acting U.S. Secretary of State, 24 July 1901, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1726, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

¹⁴² “Italians Killed,” *The Caucasian*, 14 July 1901. (Shreveport, LA)

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Webb reports a different tenor to the press discourse, suggesting that the *Greenville Times* on 13 July 1901 “condoned the murderous assault on two Sicilians in Erwin, MS by asserting that one of the men, Vincenzo Serio, was ‘a source of trouble to the neighborhood ever since he took up his residence’” (Webb,

Pascagoula Democrat-Star referred to the incident as an “assassination” a “carefully planned assassination,” in fact, not a lynching.¹⁴⁵ *The Greenville Times* referred to the lynch mob as the “Erwin assassins.”¹⁴⁶ *The Greenville Times* went on to “deplore” the killing and reported that the Young Men’s Business League of Greenville submitted a resolution “denounce[ing] the cowardly assassination of [the] two helpless Italians.”¹⁴⁷ The resolution, which passed unanimously, requested that “those perpetrating this murder may be discovered and brought to justice and that the governor be requested to offer a suitable reward for the arrest and conviction of the guilty parties.”¹⁴⁸ *The Times* explained, if the “assassins” were not “denounced... it would stand as a barrier to the advancement of any improvement in the county.”¹⁴⁹ On par with this rhetoric pointedly critical of the killing, Governor Longino of Mississippi, the only Italian American governor ever to have been elected to a southern state and upon whom I will elaborate further in chapter four, ordered a careful investigation and announced that he would “do everything in his power to have the assassins apprehended and punished.”¹⁵⁰

“The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886-1910,” 183). Additionally, Webb cites the 12 July 1901 issues of the *Vicksburg Post* to say that, “The plying of the trade by the Italians was thought to interfere with the business of some of the stores in the vicinity and the peddlers['] presence was viewed as an obtrusion” (Webb, “The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886-1910,” 187). While this reading remains more comparable with previous cases where Italians were lynched because of their outsider status, with only two references to support this more traditional lynching explanation, I challenge Webb’s interpretation. As I will demonstrate through my reading of a broader sampling of primary sources, this case instead offers insight into change over time as much of the reporting called this incident an “assault” or “assassination” rather than a lynching.

¹⁴⁵ “Italians Killed,” *The Caucasian*, 14 July 1901 (Shreveport, LA); “The Italian Killing,” *The Pascagoula Democrat-Star*, 26 July 1901 (Pascagoula, MS).

¹⁴⁶ *Greenville Times*, 17 August 1901. (Washington County, MS)

¹⁴⁷ *Greenville Times*, 20 July 1901. (Washington County, MS)

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ “The Italian Killing,” *The Pascagoula Democrat-Star*, 26 July 1901 (Pascagoula, MS).

Not only did the rhetoric surrounding the incident diverge from previous lynchings, but discourse concerning the subsequent investigation to discover the parties responsible for the lynch mob additionally included a more hopeful tone. In a personal letter from Carignani to the Acting U.S. Secretary of State Alvey Adee, Carignani implored that the Erwin incident end more “nobly” than previous cases. After all, Carignani explained, one of the victims survived and his testimony would provide a “powerful means to detect the murderers.”¹⁵¹ Even the press spoke favorably of the likelihood that the men responsible for the lynching would be held accountable: “If talk can mean anything, the men who killed the three Italians are known and unless they leave the country, will be arrested.”¹⁵² *Le Meschacebe* reported that authorities were hopeful and the state of Mississippi had adopted a resolution “condemning the outrage.”¹⁵³

Despite this promising divergence from previous accountings of lynchings of Sicilians, the Grand Jury report concluded that “after a careful and rigid examination and investigation of all the witnesses to find sufficient evidence as to who were the perpetrators of this assassination.”¹⁵⁴ Ultimately, the jurors found that the Serio’s “came to their death by the act of God in that they died from gun shot wounds at the hands of unknown parties to this jury.”¹⁵⁵ While unable to “ascertain the guilty

¹⁵¹ Signor Carignani (The Chargé d'Affaires of His Majesty) Personal Letter to Acting U.S. Secretary of State Alvey Adee, 30 August 1901, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1728, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

¹⁵² *Greenville Times*, 17 August 1901. (Washington County, MS)

¹⁵³ “Italy is Indignant,” *Le Meschacebe*, 27 July 1901. (Lucy, LA)

¹⁵⁴ *Greenville Times*, 14 September 1901. (Washington County, MS)

¹⁵⁵ Signor Carignani (The Chargé d'Affaires of His Majesty) to Acting U.S. Secretary of State David Hill, 22 July 1901, Notes from the Italian Legation in the U.S. to the Department of State, #1726, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

parties,” the Grand Jury still concluded: “We deplore and denounce the cowardly midnight assassination of two helpless Italians.”¹⁵⁶ Official lynching statistics determined the alleged offense of the Serio’s as “unknown.”¹⁵⁷

Without considering the discursive divergence of one incident as evidence of a wholesale shift in the manner in which Italians were racially categorized, this does suggest several important conclusions. The Erwin incident confirms the racial transiency of Italians/Sicilians, as 1899 rhetoric considered their lynching as necessary for “white supremacy” while 1901 rhetoric questioned the validity of their “cowardly assassination.” In this regard, the lynching of the Serio’s indicates that the racial construction of Italians remained influx and fluid. Secondly, while one case may not represent a shift, a lack of subsequent lynchings certainly offers evidence to support the contention that Italians were increasingly being subsumed within the white mainstream. The Erwin case remains nearly the final case of an Italian/Sicilian being lynched in the South; only one other incident in the Gulf South would occur, where two Sicilians were lynched nine years later in 1910 Tampa. Both the rhetoric of the Erwin lynching and the larger context in which it occurred suggests a progressive restructuring of the racial location of Italian/Sicilian within the Gulf South.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ *Greenville Times*, 14 September 1901. (Washington County, MS)

¹⁵⁷ *Project HAL*

¹⁵⁸ This remains decades earlier than the claims within the current historiography on the “whitening” of Italians.

From 1891 to 1910, the lynchings of Italians and Sicilians in the Gulf South suggest both the significance of contextual specificity as well as the presence of shared characteristics. In terms of continuity across these various incidents, each of the lynchings included a post-lynching shift in press rhetoric that began to employ an increasingly hostile anti-Italian and anti-immigrant sentiment and a citizenship and indemnity crisis where the Italian government requested payments for the wrongful deaths of Italian citizens. Despite these shared patterns, chronicling the backgrounds of the victims and the particularities in each case illustrates the limitations of a strictly statistical or sociological assessment of lynchings and the importance of historically accounting for time and place context. Additionally, while press accounts of Italian lynchings in the 1880s and 1890s readily referred to those events explicitly as lynchings, by 1901, most accounts described the deaths of the Serio's in Erwin, Mississippi as an "assassination." This discursive shift represents a change over time in the way that the public read and processed the killings of Italians and provides evidence that Italians, even Sicilians, were beginning to be more incorporated within the white, native-born community.

While race, ethnicity, exceptionality and perceived status as "outsiders" meant that Italians and Sicilians were susceptible to being lynched, race and ethnicity were not ultimately the sole motives behind these lynchings, and Italians were not lynched *because* they were Italian. Instead, while many of these cases included economic implications and class-based competition, distinguishing characteristics, temporality and geography contributed to each lynching incident. Furthermore, the racialized anti-

Italian discourse in the aftermath of each lynching, an after effect of the violence, rather than its cause, served as a discursive means to legitimize the violence. More broadly, this uncovers the instability of the meaning of violence along with the precariousness of discourses on race and citizenship.

Foremost, the lynchings of Italians and Sicilians served to contest their whiteness and present evidence of their racial transiency in the Gulf South. As described in Chapter 1, the lynchings consolidated an Italian identity, while at the same time they drew into question Italian access to the protections of white identity in the white supremacist Gulf South. This exposes the fungibility of racial construction and demonstrates that Italians were racially categorized differently, sometimes white and sometimes not, in different moments and for different reasons. Ultimately, because of this transiency, Italians helped to both disrupt and consolidate the region's racially binary discourse within the legal and ideological landscape of the Gulf South at the turn-of-the-century.

Chapter 3
**The “Privileged Dago”: “Electoral Freaks and Monstrosities” in Louisiana’s
Disenfranchisement Debates**

“People always speak of Louisiana as a State of mixed faces and nationalities, but if there is anything more mixed than its voters will be under the suffrage ordinance... We can crow over our sister States very much like the circus man of having the most extraordinary collection and aggregation of voters in the world, electoral freaks of all kinds, voting through their wives, their children and their grandfathers” (Times Democrat, 1898).¹

On March 22, 1896, a “festive” parade complete with reportedly fifty Italians upon heavy draft horses made their way through the streets of New Orleans; the “thundering of the hoofs on the pavements sounded like the march of two or three regiments of cavalry.”² Marchers shot off fireworks “promiscuously” and carried lanterns, sticks and banners, one of which even had a live rooster perched upon it. Reports noted, “There must have been more than a dozen goats in the parade, some of them being led along and others carried in a wagon, and allowed to feed on flowers. The roosters were there also, some perched on staffs, others in bird cages.”³ The participants carried banners which read, in English, “Death to Dr. Bruns’ pet, the suffrage amendment,” “Knownothing Bruns,” “Down with the suffrage amendment,” “We are Democrats and not grasshoppers,” and “We demand that the mechanic, the clerk and the laborer, white and black, have the same privilege to cast his ballot on election day as the millionaire.”⁴ Parading beneath an Italian flag, the newly formed

¹ “Insult to our Native Citizens” and “Our Voters,” *Times Democrat*, 6 March 1898.

² “Italian Regulars paraded by the Ring, After a Meeting at which No English was Spoken,” *Daily Picayune*, 23 March 1896.

³ “The March of the Regulars,” *Daily Picayune*, 18 April 1896.

⁴ *Ibid.* Dr. Bruns (an at-large delegate and local leader of “political reform associations”) was responsible for drafting the suffrage amendment proposal (Democratic Party (La.) State Central Committee, *The Convention of ’98: A Complete Work on the Greatest Political Event in Louisiana’s History, and a Sketch of the Men Who Composed It. Together with a Historical Review of the Conventions of the Past, and the General Assembly*

“Italian Club,” marched in opposition to the proposed suffrage amendment set to exclude both African American and the “illiterate,” “ignorant” and “foreign born vote.” Subsequently dubbed the “Dago Parade,” this public demonstration offers particular insight into how immigrant-voting rights mapped onto disenfranchisement efforts in post-Reconstruction Louisiana.

Before delving into the post-Reconstruction disenfranchisement debates, the political context of post-Civil War Louisiana needs to be established. In 1868, as part of military Reconstruction, forty-nine black delegates met with forty-nine white delegates at the constitutional convention and passed the most liberal constitution in Louisiana-state history. Under the radical Republican mandate, Louisiana was compelled to submit a new Constitution “in harmony with the constitution of the United States,” meaning Louisiana lawmakers were required to make “negroes citizens of the state and of the United States” and were forbidden from passing legislation that would violate their civil rights.⁵ The resulting constitution included a bill of rights, which defined all persons “without regard to race, color, or previous condition of servitude” as citizens, prohibited racial segregation in public education, enfranchised all adult males (regardless of property ownership qualifications), awarded pensions to veterans of the War of 1812 and even established state-run care

Which Called the Constitutional Convention of 1898. (New Orleans: W.E. Myers, 1898)). I will subsequently account for this appeal to both “white and black” potential voters later in the chapter.

⁵ “Constitutions Past and Present,” *Daily Picayune*, 6 February 1898. As remembered by the *Daily Picayune*, “Congress, therefore, determined upon a policy of forced reconstruction, under the ‘ironclad laws,’ as they have called them, put the southern states under military rulers, who were charged with the power and authority to work the machinery of constitutional government and reconstruct the states according to the plans laid down and thus for quite a while General Philip Sheridan was supreme in Louisiana.”

for the “insane,” and education for deaf and blind persons. Yet, with its far-reaching racial and social implications, the 1868 convention was later remembered as being made up of “strangers and aliens to our state.”⁶ Instead, by 1898, Louisianans would identify their “Black Constitution” at the forefront of their unresolved Reconstruction issues:

That black and tan convention set the heel of the negro despot upon the neck of the white people of this state for nearly ten years, until thrown off by the uprising of 1874 and the election of 1876, where the white people again came into their own. Crowds of adventurers, carpet-bag in hand, flocked from all quarters of the union, like hungry vultures over a dead carcass.⁷

Thus, in 1898, the 1868 constitution was understood in popular memory as a blemish upon the otherwise “white” history of Louisiana politics. As a result, (white) Louisiana legislators would begin to turn their attention to addressing the “diabolical object of humiliating and trampling” and would work to reclaim their “power [that] had been overthrown in a colossal war.”⁸

Upon the removal of the last remaining federal forces from Louisiana as a result of the Compromise of 1877, a constitutional convention was called in 1879 “calculated to forever rid the state of the possibility of negro domination” despite the

⁶ Ibid.; Charles Vincent, “Black Constitution Makers: The Constitution of 1868,” in *In Search of Fundamental Law: Louisiana’s Constitutions, 1812-1974*, ed. Warren M Billings and Edward F Haas (Lafayette, La.: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1993).

⁷ “In the words of Gayarre: ‘During those eventful times, the hoof of the conqueror’s horse had withered her opulent fields in the land which was once residence for her brave and free population of the Caucasian race, and an Elysium for her African bondsmen. Farewell, my love, as thy son shall cling to thee in poverty and sorrow, and nestle in the scarred bosom, with more rapturous constancy than when thy face was beaming with joy and hope, when wealth was thy handmaid, and the eye of God not averted in anger from that noble brow where once rested the pride of sovereignty’” (“Constitutions Past and Present,” *Daily Picayune*, 6 February 1898).

⁸ “The Wrong of Negro Suffrage,” *Daily Picayune*, 1 January 1898.

“obstacle” of the 14th amendment.⁹ The convention rescinded civil rights legislation that guaranteed equality under the law, granted the right to vote to “all adult male citizens and even to foreigners who had declared an intent to become citizens,” and retained a poll tax (between \$1.00 and \$1.50) as a requirement for suffrage.¹⁰

Although the convention claimed to be preserving the civil rights of all citizens, regardless of race, they eliminated those provisions from the 1868 bill of rights that fixed wages, guaranteed equal rights, and prohibited discrimination in public education.¹¹ Those articles that banned the establishment of segregated schools and forbade discriminatory treatment were also stricken.

Louisiana legislators did not actually disenfranchise black voters in 1879—because federal troops had been withdrawn on the condition that “the rights of all citizens would be respected;” acting otherwise would have risked federal intervention.¹² Additionally, convention delegates wanted to prevent the mass exodus of African Americans from the state, since both their labor and presence (for means of Congressional representation) were needed.¹³ Although the New Orleans press would still report that, “Negroes are a demoralizing and degrading incubus and curse upon the white people of the American republic,” African Americans retained their

⁹ “Constitutions Past and Present,” *Daily Picayune*, 6 February 1898).

¹⁰ Ronald M. Labbe, “That the Reign of Robbery May Never Return to Louisiana: The Constitution of 1879,” in *In Search of Fundamental Law: Louisiana’s Constitutions, 1812-1974*, ed. Warren M Billings and Edward F Haas (Lafayette, La.: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1993), 86. Labbe mentions that the program of interracial education had only functioned briefly in New Orleans. Vincenza Scarpaci argues that this clause may have come out of the sugar parishes, where planters used their money and influence to sway the Italian vote (“Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-1910,” in *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America*, ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (Routledge, 2003), 60–76).

¹¹ Labbe, “That the Reign of Robbery May Never Return to Louisiana: The Constitution of 1879,” 88.

¹² *Ibid.*, 85.

¹³ Even so, 10,000 African Americans left the state that year (*Ibid.*).

right to vote in 1880s Louisiana.¹⁴ However, such a tenuous allowance would steadily disintegrate by the 1890s, as black suffrage surfaced as the major source of political tension in Louisiana and a primary cause for the deep divisions within the state's Democratic party.

With regards to the history of suffrage rights, Alexander Keyssar offers the most comprehensive overview of the right to vote in United States history. He challenges the concept that universal suffrage was an inevitable story of preeminent progress and American exceptionalism. Instead, Keyssar claims that the history of U.S. voting rights “is a history of both expansion and contraction, of inclusion and exclusion, of shifts in direction and momentum at different places and at different times.”¹⁵ In his investigation of why the right to vote was won as well as lost, he cites an overarching theme throughout the various historical eras: the right to vote has always been contested, the breadth of suffrage has always been a major issue and the stakes of suffrage have often been linked to the integration or lack of integration of the poor and working class into the polity. He cites war as the most unacknowledged factor in the expansion of suffrage rights, while mentioning class tensions as the most under-explained and under-discussed factor that has contributed to the contraction of suffrage rights. Significantly, Keyssar also demonstrates the extent that even with the privileging of a federal conception of citizenship after the 14th amendment, which offered the first appearance of the “right to vote” in the Constitution, voting rights

¹⁴ “The Wrong of Negro Suffrage,” *Daily Picayune*, 1 January 1898.

¹⁵ Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), xxii.

remained the relative prerogative of state law until the 1960s.¹⁶ Kessyar also links the history of African American suffrage with women's suffrage and immigrant suffrage: The formation and growth of an industrial working class, coupled with the creation of a free black agricultural working class in the South, generated a widespread, potent and sometimes successful opposition to a broad-based franchise."¹⁷ Thus marking a parallel development between Jim Crow disfranchisement and the narrowing of voting rights for immigrants, this chapter reveals how Louisiana's suffrage debates represented a convergence of similar motives in opposition to universal voting rights.

In terms of the context for these debates, while Louisiana has often been described as challenging norms and expectations found elsewhere in southern states, access to voting in Louisiana throughout the nineteenth century remained relatively in line with nearby states like Alabama, Mississippi and Florida.¹⁸ Across these states, voting was restricted to white, U.S. citizens, who met a certain residency requirement; criminals were also excluded from voting through 1855 and between 1870 and 1923.¹⁹ Expanded voting rights under Radical Reconstruction was a temporary aberration, as southern states upon official military withdrawal in 1877 began considering various means of disfranchisement; in fact, all southern states imposed or authorized their legislature to impose a poll tax between 1885 and 1901.²⁰ This same era witnessed a contraction of voting rights across the nation—while declarant aliens

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 296.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xxiv.

¹⁸ See Keyssar's extensive tables, especially Tables A.5-A.13 (*Ibid.*, 320-45).

¹⁹ Significantly, miscegenation was specifically noted as a crime that warranted disenfranchisement in both Alabama & South Carolina (*Ibid.*, Table A.7, 324-27)

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Table A.10, 334-35.

had originally been allowed to vote in many states nationwide, all states with this special provision had terminated their allowance by 1926.²¹ Similarly, between 1870 and 1924, literacy was additionally imposed in various states across the country as a requirement for voting.²² While most states specified that a registrant demonstrate their literacy in English, some states like Mississippi and Virginia did not specify a language in their requirement; significantly, Louisiana appears to be the only state that allowed a registrant to “demonstrate [their] ability to read and write in English or *mother tongue*.”²³ All this being said, disenfranchisement and the constriction of voting rights was not a strictly southern phenomenon, nor was Louisiana the first southern state to engage in a campaign to restrict voting. Yet, the particularities of Louisiana’s suffrage debates, following in the wake of disenfranchisement in Mississippi (1890) and South Carolina (1895), will be the focus of this chapter.

This chapter provides an overview of the disenfranchisement debates, the implementation of a grandfather clause and the imposition of other voting restrictions in 1890s Louisiana. Although this is a relatively well-traveled topic, I focus less on the means and motives for disenfranchising African American and instead on the rhetoric and discussions concerned with the question of whether foreigners,

²¹ Ibid., Table A.12, 337-39. “Declarant Aliens” were allowed to vote in the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota and Texas. “Declarant permission” was terminated in all of the previous states by 1926. With regards to the states under investigation in this study, the special provision was terminated in Alabama (1901), Florida (1895) and Louisiana (1898).

²² Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, Table A.13, 340-43. Of the states that imposed a literacy requirement, the following specified that a registrant must demonstrate their ability to read and write in the English language: Alabama, Arizona, California, Georgia, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Oregon and Washington.

²³ My emphasis; I will return to this regional particularity in my subsequent discussion.

specifically “dagos,” should be allowed to vote. What was the effect of disenfranchisement on Italian immigrants? Why did Louisiana ultimately pass a “Privileged Dago Clause” that worked to protect Italian-voting rights over those of African Americans? What was the long-term impact of Italian enfranchisement, and how was this evidence of both regional particularities as well as larger nationwide trends?

While immigration and southern scholars occasionally make reference to the “Dago Clause” in Louisiana, only two scholars, George Cunningham and Vicenza Scarpaci have provided sustained attention to this historical moment.²⁴ Both, however, engage more with the question of what these debates reveal about the relationship between Italians and African Americans in Louisiana. Cunningham contends that Italians between 1896 and 1898 lacked the traditional southern impulse towards anti-black prejudice, in part because the 1896 Hahnville lynching actually created common cause between Italians and African Americans (since they had both fallen victim to “native white prejudices”) and because the economic status of Italians positioned them to be inherently more willing to cooperate with African Americans.²⁵ Cunningham goes on to conclude that by 1898, “Italians had learned their lesson, to

²⁴ The following provide the most in-depth discussion of the impact of Louisiana disfranchisement in Louisiana: Vicenza Scarpaci, *Italian Immigrants in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes: Recruitment, Labor Conditions, and Community Relations, 1880-1910* (New York: Arno Press, 1980); Vicenza Scarpaci, “Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-1910,” in *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America*, ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (Routledge, 2003), 60–76; George Cunningham, “The Italian, a Hindrance to White Solidarity in Louisiana, 1890-1898,” *Journal of Negro History* 50, no. 1 (January 1965): 22–36. James Barrett and David Roediger also make brief reference to the “debate over Italian whiteness” at the 1898 constitutional convention in Louisiana, for which they cite Cunningham, Scarpaci and Handlin (“Inbetween Peoples: Race Nationality and the ‘New Immigrant’ Working Class,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16.3 (Spring 1997): 108-9).

²⁵ Cunningham, “The Italian, a Hindrance to White Solidarity in Louisiana, 1890-1898.” However, my chapter on lynching demonstrates how African American responses to the lynching of Italians were more varied and complicated.

adopt the customs and prejudices of white Louisianans in order to gain acceptance.”²⁶ Rightfully so, in her earlier work, Scarpaci, one of the leading (and few) scholars on Italian communities in the South, criticizes Cunningham for failing to demonstrate exactly how Italians switched from a “pro-Negro” position to an “anti-Negro” position by 1898. In her later work, Scarpaci attempts to more critically account for the changing relationship between African Americans and Italian immigrants, where she concludes that Italian (or rather, Sicilian) self-interest and self-identity modified the adoption of discrimination and prejudice towards African Americans, which allowed for a certain amount of interaction and cooperation between the two communities. As she explains, “Sicilian immigrants complied with the outward signs of Louisiana’s racist practices, their behavior fell short of strict adherence. Instead, they followed their own traditions of economic individualism and chose self-sufficiency.”²⁷

In addition to recognizing the calculated choices that Italians made in their own political organizing, I also align myself squarely in line with Scarpaci’s call to reexamine immigrant adaptations to racism.²⁸ I argue that Italians resided in a position of racial transiency in Louisiana—in certain moments, when their color and race became uncoupled, they were subject to being treated as other non-whites, while

²⁶ As summarized in Scarpaci, *Italian Immigrants in Louisiana’s Sugar Parishes*, 276.

²⁷ Scarpaci, “Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-1910,” 61.

²⁸ Barrett and Roediger, according to Scarpaci, “leave unexplained the complicated way in which Italians experienced race in Louisiana and reinforces the importance of looking closely at local conditions to measure the relevance of this concept” (Scarpaci, “Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-1910,” 75). To be clear, Scarpaci is more concerned with Italian “consciousness” while I am more focused on how Italians were racially viewed. As Scarpaci argues, “In Louisiana, while Italians did move along the trajectory from ‘in-between-ness’ toward social acceptance by shedding some of their outwardly different cultural practices, their conformance to the dominant system was one of compliance to the outward forms, and not necessarily the full weight of racism” (Ibid., 75).

in other moments, Louisianans collapsed their race and color, thus privileging their color over their racial suspectability. The protected franchise of Italians offers further evidence to mark their condition in Louisiana as racially transient, noting, however, that the rhetoric of the voting debates was employed in less explicitly racial terms and more in terms of rights of citizenship. However, in addition to asking somewhat different questions and approaching this historical moment from a multiplicity of perspectives, I depart from Scarpaci who cautions against misinterpreting that Italians “benefitted from American racism.”²⁹ In fact, I would suggest, in part, that is essentially what happened during Louisiana’s suffrage debates. Ultimately, the protection of Italian voting rights in Louisiana was motivated by labor demands and local politics, couched in the rhetoric of rightful citizenship and racial questionability.

I begin by providing a historical overview of party politics in 1890s Louisiana, including the divisions within the Democratic Party, the peculiarities of Louisiana Populism, as well as the strange Republican bedfellows.³⁰ From there, I provide an overview of the 1896 suffrage debates, including motives and reactions to the Italian parade that marched in opposition to the proposed suffrage amendment. Then I turn to the focal point of Louisiana’s disenfranchisement debates: the 1898 Constitutional Convention and the ensuing debate over the proposal submitted by the Suffrage Committee, whereby the “electoral freaks and monstrosities” and the “Privileged Dago” remained at the center of the controversial suffrage question.

²⁹ Scarpaci, “Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-1910, 73.

³⁰ As I subsequently discuss, the strange Republican bedfellows variously included northern carpetbaggers, members of the region’s free black population, Louisiana Populists, as well as Democratic sugar planters who at one point renamed themselves the “Lily White Republicans.”

Ultimately, the very reason why Italians retained the right to vote in 1898 was the result of their perceived political utility to the (Regular) Democratic Party.³¹ Those who opposed the “Regulars” opposed the “Dago Parade” and the “Privileged Dago” voter and did so in terms of citizenship and the racial questionability of Italians, as well as by appropriating existing xenophobic and anti-Italian rhetoric. In addition to the very real concern regarding the foreignness of Italians organizing as Italians (not Americans) and marching under an Italian flag, this discourse allowed critics to capitalize on existing anti-Italian prejudices and to secure popular support for their main objective, the elimination of local “bossism” and defeat of the Regular Democrats. Ultimately, however, bossism prevailed; Italian voting rights were protected because of the perceived functionality of Italians as a useful constituent in the “native white political machine.”³² As I demonstrate, this preservation of Italian voting was not prompted by their necessarily elevated status, but rather functioned as a product of their utility for “home rule.” Additionally, although efforts to limit African American voting and Italian voting were similarly motivated and grounded in a fear of lost labor control, this did not mean that Italians and African Americans developed a unified political coalition to combat disenfranchisement. In contrast to previous readings of African American and Italian cooperation, but on par with Scarpaci’s claim regarding Italians acting on behalf of their own self-interest, I reveal that rather than allying themselves with African Americans as the potential victims of disenfranchisement, Italians strategically attempted to align themselves on the side

³¹ I elaborate on the divisions within the Democratic Party in the following section.

³² Scarpaci, *Italian Immigrants in Louisiana’s Sugar Parishes*, 288.

the disenfranchisers as native, white “southerners.” Such a reconfiguration not only divided a potentially united front in opposition to suffrage restrictions (thus facilitating the disfranchisement of African Americans) but also contributed in part to the progressive articulation of Louisiana’s legal and racial categories in terms of a more binary, less fluid structure. Additionally, reinforcing claims about the performative aspect of citizenship argued in Chapter 1, I flag moments throughout these debates that demonstrate how the political organizing of Sicilians and other Italians as “Italian voters” reveals a fledgling *Italianità* that worked to steadily erase their transnationally imported regional factionalism.

As a result of the enduring conflict over unresolved Reconstruction, racial, and economic issues, Louisiana party politics were a complicated affair in the 1880s-1890s.³³ To begin with, the Democratic Party was no longer the monolithic force it had been in Louisiana during the Civil War and Reconstruction.³⁴ With the elimination of the common enemy that had bound them together under radical Republican and military rule during Reconstruction, the Democratic Party in Louisiana had officially splintered between “Regulars” and “Reformers” by 1878.

³³ For the most comprehensive and most oft-cited political history of the time period, see Joy J. Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age: Politics and Urban Progress, 1880-1896* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1969). See also Edward F Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City: New Orleans in the Progressive Era, 1896-1902* (Ruston, La.: McGinty Publications, Louisiana Tech University, 1988); Laura D Kelley, *The Irish in New Orleans* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2014); Kent B Germany, *New Orleans after the Promises: Poverty, Citizenship, and the Search for the Great Society* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

³⁴ Walter Johnson cautions that such a monolith never actually existed since even during the Civil War, the South was a multiplicity of competing goals, needs, attitudes, beliefs and opinions (*River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013). However, the specific divisions within Louisiana’s Democratic Party remain crucial to the narrative of disfranchisement.

Over the next several decades, the “Regulars” adopted different names at different moments: the Ring, the Choctaw Club, the Regular Democratic Organization, and the Old Regulars. Regardless of their various iterations, they remained the same organization under a different name, practicing the same brand of politicking: classic urban machine politics. The “Regulars,” or the “Ring,” as they were called during the 1890s, controlled New Orleans municipal politics through a well-established machine of patronage in exchange for votes.³⁵ Ethnic-ward bosses, traditionally of German and Irish-descent like the infamous John Fitzpatrick (New Orleans’s mayor between 1892 and 1896), secured local allegiances and funneled votes to the Ring tickets.³⁶

The Ring’s constituents, New Orleans’s working-class and immigrant populations as well as French-speaking Creoles, were rewarded for their vote with jobs, social services and community assistance. In the cotton parishes of rural Louisiana or if patronage in New Orleans failed to secure the necessary votes, the Ring additionally sanctioned and utilized violence, intimidation and economic threat, whereby workers and tenants were only hired if they voted Democrat.³⁷ Election fraud was also a mainstay of the Ring’s political maneuvering; for example, not only

³⁵ Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 5. Although the Ring officially dissolved and reorganized as the Choctaw Club in 1896 with the intent of uniting Louisiana’s Democrats, many of the main players of the Ring, including Fitzpatrick, helped to found the Choctaw organization. As a result, “At the turn of the century, the Ring remained the prevalent faction in New Orleans politics. For the next fifty years, the Regular machine would dominate the South’s largest city. Its demise, like the death of Mark Twain, had been greatly exaggerated” (Edward Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 37; see also Scarpaci, *Italian Immigrants in Louisiana’s Sugar Parishes*).

³⁶ Kelley, *The Irish in New Orleans*; Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*; Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*; Germany, *New Orleans after the Promises*. For a clear articulation of the changing names and iterations of the Democratic factions, see Haas’s Figure 1 in *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 103. Also noteworthy, by the 1890s, Sicilian immigrants joined the ranks of the traditionally German and Irish boss leaders. I will subsequently return to my discussion of John Fitzpatrick, since he was elected to the state legislature in 1898 and was also active in the disenfranchisement debates.

³⁷ Donna A Barnes, *The Louisiana Populist Movement, 1881-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 51.

did employers regularly vote on behalf of their black employees, but more votes were often cast for Democratic candidates than legally possible based on the number of registered voters.³⁸

Founded on the premise of reforming Louisiana politics, the primary opposition to the “Regulars” and their alleged corruption and voter fraud were the “Reformers,” also referred to as the “Reform Democrats,” the Independent Party or the Citizen’s League.³⁹ Known within New Orleans as the “party of wealth,” the Reformers represented the city’s businessmen and commercial elite.⁴⁰ The Reformers won the occasional election; however, without a strong or solid constituent base, they generally held limited success in New Orleans, especially since their reform efforts meant cutting jobs and attacking the patronage system.⁴¹ Additionally, their temporary victories resulted from the fact that Reformers were primarily businessmen and political amateurs, while the Regulars were by and large professional politicians. Thus, in the post-bellum period, although both technically Democratic factions with ties to the White League and other racial supremacist organizations, the Ring and the Citizens League represented different social backgrounds, different classes and

³⁸ Ibid., 183.

³⁹ Despite the multiplicity of these names and their occasional interchangeability, I will refer to the political divisions within the Democratic party by their most common usage during the period under investigation: the Ring (Regulars) and the Citizens League (Reformers).

⁴⁰ Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*; Kelley, *The Irish in New Orleans*. Haas also cites the Reformers as using the following names, depending on the campaign: Citizens’ Conservative Movement, Committee of One Hundred, Young Men’s Democratic Association, Anti-Lottery League.

⁴¹ Kelley, *The Irish in New Orleans*. The Reformers temporarily seized control of Louisiana’s gubernatorial election in 1896, a point on which I subsequently return, largely due to falsified election results. Anti-lottery reformer Murphy Foster was elected governor, but not only did returns in some parishes surpass the number of registered voters, but Foster’s machine was credited with transporting Italian voters by train to New Orleans to fraudulently vote in the election (Scarpaci, *Italian Immigrants in Louisiana’s Sugar Parishes*, 281).

different political agendas in New Orleans.⁴² These political divisions remained at the core of the ensuing suffrage debates.

The particularities of Louisiana's Populist Party also contributed to the complicated allegiances during Louisiana's move towards disenfranchisement.⁴³ On par with farmer's unions elsewhere across the country, the Louisiana Farmer's Union was similarly created as a third party movement by disaffected Democrats; they counted rural whites among their main constituents. Yet, by the 1890s, unable to secure major electoral victories as an independent third party, the LFU was in the midst of an identity crisis—while some members were interested in aligning with reform Democrats, other LFU members were not comfortable endorsing a Democratic platform founded on white supremacy. As a result, unlike their western and national counterparts who established political alliances with the Democratic Party, in 1892 the LFU brokered a fusion agreement with Louisiana's Republican Party.⁴⁴ Louisiana's Republican Party was largely made up of northern "carpetbaggers," certain factions within the planter elite and Louisiana's free black population, at least those not coerced into voting the "Regular" Democratic ticket. However, with the defeat of the Republican-Populist fusion ticket, by 1894, as part of their political maneuvering and pandering, Populists in Louisiana began officially endorsing key aspects of white supremacy and began employing an intentionally

⁴²In the moral rural parishes in Louisiana outside of New Orleans, class additionally complicated political allegiances. As I demonstrate in the subsequent section, while planters historically voted Democrat, sugar planters split with state Democrats in 1896 over the issue of sugar subsidies and defected to the Populist-Fusion ticket (Barnes, *The Louisiana Populist Movement, 1881-1900*, 198).

⁴³ For the most comprehensive history of (the failure of) Louisiana's Populist Party, see Barnes, *The Louisiana Populist Movement, 1881-1900*.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 161.

racist rhetoric and strategy that included a proposal for a “white primary” and a secret ballot.⁴⁵ Unlike traditional readings of western Populism, Louisiana Populism was not a racially progressive movement by 1894 and would remain active within the state’s disenfranchisement debates as well.

Further confounding party politics in Louisiana were the geospatial factors that contributed to an intense regional divide among planter elites across the state.⁴⁶ While one would assume that plantation owners statewide would have aligned themselves with other plantation owners and a Democratic Party committed to white supremacy, that does not take into account the extent to which “black belt [cotton] parishes” operated differently than their counterpart “sugar parishes.”⁴⁷ First, because cotton plantations, located in northwest and northeast Louisiana, were often worked by black sharecroppers who relied on crop-lien credit, “if they behaved in an objectionable way, they risked having their crop-lien credit reduced or cut off entirely.”⁴⁸ As a result, although their work was relatively autonomous and not performed as gang labor, as a group, (black) cotton sharecroppers remained

⁴⁵ Barnes additionally notes that the proposal of the white primary was in direct opposition with those goals endorsed by the Regular Democrats who wanted to continue “reaping the electoral benefits of a manipulated black vote” (Ibid., 181). In terms of the extent to which white supremacy was incorporated into the 1894 platforms: “The only component of the white supremacy frame that they persistently attacked was the one concerning white political unity. The other belief components—that whites were the superior race, that major political offices should be filled exclusively by whites, and that only whites should have voting rights—were at times embraced, as other times avoided as topics of conversation, but rarely publicly criticized” (Barnes, *The Louisiana Populist Movement, 1881-1900*, 161). I subsequently elaborate on the “secret ballot” in my discussion of suffrage amendment proposals at the 1898 Constitutional Convention in Louisiana.

⁴⁶ See Barnes’s very useful map in *The Louisiana Populist Movement, 1881-1900*, 37.

⁴⁷ As explained by historian Donna Barnes, Louisiana was divided into three particular geographies, accompanied by their attendant economies: alluvial cotton plantation parishes, alluvial sugar plantations and backland cotton parishes. While this chapter will mostly engage in the differences between sugar and cotton plantations, it is worth noting the characteristics of the backland cotton parishes: backland cotton parishes were located in north-central and northwestern Louisiana and occupied by small, independent (white and black) farmers who began planting cotton to supplement their economy (Ibid., 38).

⁴⁸ Ibid., 37.

economically and politically vulnerable and unable to politically agitate, in addition to their votes being fraudulently cast or violently coerced. Alternatively, despite being closely supervised, the black majority who worked on the alluvial sugar plantations, located in southern Louisiana, enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy because of their specialized knowledge and skills.⁴⁹ Additionally, sugar planters were not average southerners. Since sugar planting required a great deal more capital than cotton and 40% of the machinery had been destroyed during the Civil War, northern investors became the primary financiers of Louisiana sugar in the post-bellum era. These northern planters lobbied the federal government for a duty on foreign sugar that would insure their domestic market; between 1890-94, they received \$30 million in sugar subsidies from a Republican federal government.⁵⁰ As a result, sugar planters encouraged their workers to vote Republican because of the “party’s steady support of sugar subsidies.”⁵¹ When Grover Cleveland’s administration abruptly repealed the sugar subsidy in 1894, Louisiana’s sugar planters dramatically and officially broke with the Democratic party and realigned their political allegiance under a new banner: the National Republican Party or the “Lily White Republicans.”⁵² In large part the result of the state’s bifurcated commercial agriculture, geospatial regionalism

⁴⁹ As John C Rodrigue explains, due to the time constraints of sugar production and the fact that sugar planters could not risk a slowdown or work stoppage, workers were able to leverage the demands of the growing season for marginal improvements in their working and living conditions (*Reconstruction in the Cane Fields: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana’s Sugar Parishes, 1862-1880* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001)). Barnes explains that such leveraging additionally translated into greater voting autonomy as well (Barnes, *The Louisiana Populist Movement, 1881-1900*).

⁵⁰ Barnes, *The Louisiana Populist Movement, 1881-1900*. Republican Benjamin Harrison was President from 1890-94, while Democrat Grover Cleveland was President from 1894-98. Also worth noting, cotton planters did not receive the same government assistance as sugar planters.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 187. Of note, Louisiana’s two Democratic senators supported the bill that rescinded the sugar subsidy. The sugar planters called themselves the National Republican Party because they intended to vote Democrat in state and local but vote Republican in national elections.

informed and redefined the already in flux political allegiances in 1890s Louisiana; these complicated loyalties and agendas would remain center stage during the state's disfranchisement debates.

While the focus of this chapter is on the consideration of Italians within politicking in Louisiana, the descendants of Irish immigrants bear mentioning since they would also play a key role in the 1890s debates. The Irish arrived in Louisiana much earlier in the century, as they founded a benevolent society in New Orleans as early as 1818. They settled primarily among the English-speaking, Anglo-American population in the Faubourg St. Marie district.⁵³ When New Orleans split into three separate, semi-autonomous municipalities between 1836-1852, the result of ethnic tensions between the Francophone Creole population and the English-speaking community, an alliance steadily developed between Irish immigrants and the Anglo-American community. By 1850, the Irish were the largest ethnic group in New Orleans and made up 20% of the city's population. According to scholar Laura Kelley, New Orleans at the advent of the Civil War was an "Irish city," where "many Irish became ardent supporters of white supremacy, in part to defend their own economic standing."⁵⁴

This is not to say that New Orleans was free from anti-Irish sentiment, as Louisiana's Know-Nothing movement in the mid-1850s unleashed a wave of anti-

⁵³ Kelley, *The Irish in New Orleans*. Faubourg St. Marie makes up today's Central Business District in New Orleans, west of Canal Street.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

Irish violence across the state.⁵⁵ However, with the growing focus upon secession and slavery, the place of the Irish within New Orleans's racial hierarchy was steadily renegotiated: "As 'whites'—as opposed to 'foreigners'—they were now considered an asset in buttressing the racial hierarchy of the South."⁵⁶ Additionally, because Irish immigrants interpreted federal intervention in the South on par with the interference of British officials in Ireland, Civil War, in effect, turned the Irish into ardent "southerners" who allied themselves with the Democrats during and after the war. The willingness of Irish immigrants to support white supremacy and defeat racial equality meant that they received mainstream political support in New Orleans as they steadily moved up the ranks. A sure sign of their integration within the city's racial landscape, although Irish immigrants only made up 7% of the city's population in 1880, William Behan, the son of Irish immigrants, was elected mayor in 1882 just as another Irish-American, David Hennessey, was appointed chief of police in 1888. Another "son of Erin," John Fitzpatrick, mayor and state legislator, would also play an active role in the question of restricting suffrage at the end of the century.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Kelley, *The Irish in New Orleans*. The Know-Nothing party in New Orleans focused on the anti-immigrant tenet of their platform, rather than their anti-Catholicism, and temporarily took political control of New Orleans in the mid-1850s. Anti-Irish violence turned into riots as Irish, including Irish policemen, were attacked and killed in the months leading up to the 1854 election. The Know-Nothing or "Reform Party" succeeded in winning control of the city and went on to expel the Irish from any city jobs. A temporary victory, the Democrats regained political control as by 1856.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁵⁷ In comparison with the established Irish immigrant community, Italians represented a similar proportion of New Orleanian residents. Recall, as discussed in both the introduction and Chapter 1, by 1890, a distinctly Sicilian and physically integrated community of Italians resided in New Orleans, estimated between 15,000-20,000, or six to eight percent of the city's population.

1896 Debate: Fear of the “Foreign Vote”

In 1896, Louisiana legislators began their concerted attempt at disenfranchising their African American population. The New Orleans and regional press explained that this was intended to increase the Democratic presence in the state and to minimize the Republican voting bloc, which was largely African American. Within these debates, the “illiterate” and “ignorant” voters were also considered suspect voting population:

There can be no greater political evil in any country where the people elect their own officers and lawmakers than the presence of a large body of ignorant and shiftless men who are clothed with the power to vote...in such a case, a community or a State may be placed politically wholly at the mercy of an element of population illiterate, densely ignorant, degraded, wholly unprincipled and for sale to any purchaser of votes.⁵⁸

According to widespread public opinion as expressed in the New Orleans press, a literacy test as a prerequisite for voting would be wise in Louisiana since the state had such a large population of illiterate voters who could possibly wield political influence through their very presence of a majority.⁵⁹ Of note, Louisiana in 1890 did in fact have the highest rates of illiteracy in the U.S. Of Louisiana’s white population, 20% were illiterate (compared to 7% nationally) along with 70% of its black population.⁶⁰ Significantly, the New Orleans press invoked the “illiterate” and “ignorant” voters interchangeably with the “foreign born vote” and the “hoodlum white vote.” Thus, the ensuing suffrage debate made an appeal not only to disenfranchising the “negro vote” but also called to disenfranchise the unnaturalized

⁵⁸ “Constitutional Convention,” *Daily Picayune*, 4 May 1896.

⁵⁹ “Illiterate and Pauper Immigration,” *Daily Picayune*, 28 January 1896.

⁶⁰ Barnes, *The Louisiana Populist Movement, 1881-1900*, 205.

foreigner and the “hundreds of illiterate, unemployed, thriftless bummers and tramps who are permitted to vote.”⁶¹

In fact, at the center of the 1896 suffrage debates, advocates of voting reform cited the 1879 clause that allowed foreign-born persons the right to vote solely upon their declared intent to naturalize. Proclaimed a means of “prostituting the rights of citizenship,” the *Daily Picayune* worried that “it invests, with all the rights and powers of citizenship, foreigners who are not citizens.”⁶² The *Times Democrat* considered it “unwise to allow a foreigner who has just landed in this country, who knows nothing of our Constitution or laws, to participate in the elections before he has become naturalized.”⁶³ Additionally problematic was the fact that these votes were seen as purchasable by “bosses and corruptionists.”⁶⁴ As the *Daily Picayune* explained,

A Dago lands in our wharves to-day. On the morrow an emissary of a ward boss takes him before a court and he declares his intention to become a citizen. This he cannot become for five years and yet he registers, and, after one year, votes. If he goes away the boss holds his certificate and a dummy votes the boss ticket, on the certificate at the election.⁶⁵

Part of this critique centered on the fact that a foreigner needed to only declare his intention to become a citizen and was allowed to vote as a “declarant alien.” Such a

⁶¹ “Vox Populi,” *Daily Picayune*, 16 February 1896.

⁶² “To Be Cured by the Suffrage Amendment,” *Daily Picayune*, 4 February 1896. In fact, the *Picayune* noted, getting rid of this clause would “cure one of the greatest political evils in Louisiana politics.”

⁶³ “The Suffrage Amendment,” *Times Democrat*, 5 April 1896. The *Times* contended that the clause had been snuck in “by a few unscrupulous politicians who hoped to utilize the recently arrived cargoes of Italians and who did not care what its effect would be.” They additionally argued that no other country or state allowed such a practice. Oregon and Michigan had since repealed their provisions that allowed un-naturalized citizens the right to vote, which meant, “Louisiana alone continues to support a law which is one of the greatest insults that could be given to American citizenship.”

⁶⁴ “Vox Populi, Correspondence which Speaks for Itself,” *Daily Picayune*, 16 February 1896.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

provision, its critics warned, centered on the concept of citizenship, as they questioned the practicality of creating “in-between citizens” who could vote in state elections but may still be called for military service by a foreign nation.⁶⁶ As a result, letters to the editor and New Orleanian editorials alike suggested that the revised suffrage ordinance should include a provision that would allow foreign-born the right to vote only after they had naturalized.⁶⁷

Republicans, like the Wilson Parish Committee, came out against the proposed amendment; they contended that it would place the government in the hands of “an autocratic few, because of their wealth and priority of advantage.”⁶⁸ More surprisingly, a faction within the Democratic Party, the “Regulars,” “repudiated the suffrage amendment and pledge[d] themselves to use their every endeavor to carry the parish against it and if possible defeat it” since the amendment would effectively limit their immigrant, working-class constituency.⁶⁹ Various other Democratic and Republican wards and precincts spoke out against the amendment, citing it as “class legislation... contrary to the principles of true Democracy.”⁷⁰ Demonstrating the factionalism within the Democratic party, reform Democrats like the Citizen’s

⁶⁶ “To Be Cured by the Suffrage Amendment,” *Daily Picayune*, 4 February 1896.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* As the *Times* argued, “The United States welcomes the people of all nations. It throws open its citizenship to all foreigners on more liberal terms than any other country, and it is certainly not unreasonable that it should require them to spend a short time in the country, prove their desire to become American citizens by going through the form of naturalization before voting for our officers” (“The Suffrage Amendment,” *Times Democrat*, 5 April 1896).

⁶⁸ “This Wilson Parish Committee,” *Daily Picayune*, 16 April 1896. Republicans in this regard claimed immigrants as a voting bloc less because of their shared values and more because they controlled immigrant labor.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ “A Bombshell for the Boys; A Sensational Meeting of the Democratic Parish Committee,” *Daily Picayune*, 25 February 1896.

League emerged as the champions of the suffrage amendment and the elimination of the foreign vote.

The “Dago Parade”: Italians Oppose the Suffrage Amendment

Amid these debates, Italian immigrants publicly and openly joined the fray and proclaimed their open opposition to disenfranchisement. In addition to politically organizing as the Italian Club, the Italian community’s denunciation of the proposed amendment culminated in a mass meeting and parade of 1,500-2,000 Italians in New Orleans in March of 1896. The proceedings of the meeting were conducted in Italian, whereby the participants elected officers and heard speeches from their community leaders. The Club concluded the meeting by passing a series of resolutions, including one committing and pledging themselves in support of the Democratic candidate Murphy Foster for governor.⁷¹ In spite of the fact that Foster was responsible for sponsoring the suffrage amendment, because his suffrage limitation was directed at African Americans, not immigrants, as well as the fact that the urban political machine delivered the Italian vote on behalf of the “Regulars,” the Italian voting bloc remained committed to helping “the party which helps the Italians.”⁷²

Notably, one of the major results of the meeting was the articulation and advocacy of a united Italian voting bloc. One of the speakers, Santo Oteri, encouraged

⁷¹ “Be it resolved, that the Italian voters of the Fourth ward pledge their united and undivided support to the Democratic ticket” (“Mauberret’s Italians: Opposed to Suffrage Amendments and Independent Movements,” *Daily Picayune*, 25 February 1896).

⁷² Joseph di Carlo, President of the Italian Club (“Italian Regulars paraded by the Ring, After a Meeting at which No English was Spoken,” *Daily Picayune*, 23 March 1896); Scarpaci, *Italian Immigrants in Louisiana’s Sugar Parishes*, 281.

participants to vote along (Democratic) party line, since the Democratic Party, he explained, “always looked to [our] interest.”⁷³ Because both Sicilians and other Italians were present at the meeting, the encouragement of a unified front among Sicilians and other Italians remains noteworthy.⁷⁴ Of special significance, Oteri invoked the rhetoric and imagery of Italian nationalism: “As [we] remember the glorious deeds of Victor Emmanuel, Garibaldi and other distinguished patriots of [our] native land and revere them, [we] should fire [our] patriotism and stand united in a solid phalanx and vote for the regular Democratic ticket at the next election.”⁷⁵ Oteri’s speech called on the figures of the Italian Risorgimento, which suggests evidence that certain members within the New Orleanian community of emigrants from Italy had adopted a sense of *Italianità* as early as the 1890s and conceptualized themselves in terms of a fully-fledged and unified Italy.⁷⁶ Additionally, Oteri appeared to look beyond regional differences in his appeal to participants at the Italian Club meeting; he called upon all participants, whether Sicilian, Genovese or Piedmontese, to unite as “Italian voters,” thus, contributing to the steady erasure of transnationally-imported regional factionalism.⁷⁷ Similarly, Joseph di Carlo, the

⁷³ “Italian Regulars paraded by the Ring, After a Meeting at which No English was Spoken,” *Daily Picayune*, 23 March 1896.

⁷⁴ Charles Matranga, the famed Sicilian from the 1891 New Orleans lynching controversy, was chosen as the Grand Marshal of the proceedings. Others present at the meeting include A. Patorno, Jack Loyacano, and Passalacqua and Theodore Cotonio.

⁷⁵ “Italian Regulars paraded by the Ring, After a Meeting at which No English was Spoken,” *Daily Picayune*, 23 March 1896.

⁷⁶ Recall, *Italianità* or Italian consciousness, represents evidence of the “Italianizing” of Sicilian immigrants. In times of crisis, whether lynching or disenfranchisement, Italians and Sicilians in Louisiana began to look beyond their regional differences transported from Italy and to develop a more universally Italian identity.

⁷⁷ One could claim that perhaps this meeting only included those from the original “Italian” settlers to New Orleans, rather than the masses of Sicilians who had arrived in the city since the 1860s. However, even without the records of the regional backgrounds of the participants, this seems highly unlikely. The Italian population in New Orleans in 1890 was assessed at 20,000, 90% of which were estimated to be Sicilian.

elected president of the proceedings, also invoked the rhetoric of Italian nationalism when he described the impending “hot” campaign and encouraged participants to “see to it that the result was different from the Italian campaign in Africa.”⁷⁸ Both speeches provide insight into the sense of an emerging *Italianità* within the New Orleanian Italian community. Moreover, this also speaks to the fact that political organizing in the name of Louisianan politics, like the lynching and citizenship crises discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, may have contributed to accelerating these reconfigurations of identity. With the conclusion of the speeches, the Italian Club meeting adjourned, though their demonstrating continued. The gathering moved into the streets, culminating in the “festive” parade with which this chapter began.

The meeting and parade were not well received in the New Orleanian press; both the *Times* and the *Picayune* disparaged the meeting at length, in part because of the perceived behavior of the marchers. The *Picayune* acknowledged that the participants at the meeting were characteristically enthusiastic and acted “with the impetuosity of the Latin races, they are ever ready to make a demonstration when there is the slightest occasion of it,” though they estimated that “one-half of them did not know what they were there for.”⁷⁹ The press described the events as an uncivilized display of “rowdyism,” a “disgraceful spectacle,” noted the use of

Either every single non-Sicilian Italian in New Orleans was present at this meeting, or one could reasonably deduce that the participants were made up of both Sicilians and other Italians. Furthermore, the infamous and well-known Charles Matranga, one of the defendants in the Hennessey murder and a survivor of the 1891 lynching in New Orleans and a Sicilian by birth, was not only present at the meeting but elected the grand marshal of the proceedings.

⁷⁸ “Italian Regulars paraded by the Ring, After a Meeting at which No English was Spoken,” *Daily Picayune*, 23 March 1896.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* The *Picayune* explained that because the proceedings were conducted in Italian, it was “safe to say that they all understood what went on in the meeting, but whether they understood its purport is another question.”

“profane language” and ultimately concluded that the parade was “a disgrace to a civilized community. The ward heelers were there in all their glory, and made a picture that was truly disheartening to the believer in a republican form of government... The great mass of the men in line were the sorriest looking set of citizens that anybody would care to rest their eye on.”⁸⁰ Not only were the marchers ignorant, but also, not worthy of being voting citizens. The New Orleans press went on to qualify their admonishment by denying the existence of “Know-Nothing” feelings in Louisiana: “Foreigners are welcomed here and treated well in ever respect; indeed our Constitution is more liberal toward them than that of any other State in the Union, and actually grants them the electoral franchise before they have become naturalized.”⁸¹ Thus, the criticism of the meeting and parade was justified, not because of anti-immigrant sentiment, but on the grounds that the marchers were “uncivilized” and unfit for self-government.

Despite their protestations to the contrary, the New Orleans press still went on to invoke a variety of ethnic stereotypes and explicitly made note of the perceived “foreignness” of the meeting. In a flurry of editorials, the *Times* went on to admonish the meeting for organizing on “race lines” and went as far as suggesting that such impudence would arouse “race prejudices.”⁸² The *Times* also noted, “American

⁸⁰ “The March of the Regulars,” *Daily Picayune*, 18 April 1896.

⁸¹ “Sunday’s Italian Parade,” *Times Democrat*, 24 March 1896. As the *Times* continued, “Welcomes all foreigners, the Italians as well as the others. There is no prejudice here against the Italians. Whatever feeling against them may have been aroused by the tragic events of six years ago has passed away, and when they prove themselves good citizens they are treated with exactly the same consideration as the people of any other nationality.”

⁸² *Times Democrat*, 24 March 1896. Language serves as an important piece of what marked this meeting as dangerous: The Italians without an understanding of English were not considered “above the level of a four-footed animal” (“The March of the Regulars,” *Daily Picayune*, 18 April 1896).

sentiment is emphatically opposed to any attempt to organize persons of foreign birth on race lines to dictate to us what our Constitution and our laws should be.”⁸³

Similarly, local politician Captain William C Dufour “vigorously and patriotically flagellated the Italian meeting held in the interest of and fostered by the regulars. He said that these men, ignorant, brutal and alien, did not even know or understand why they were called together for speech and for parade.”⁸⁴ Capitalizing on existing xenophobic tropes, Dufour’s comment regarding the “regulars” tellingly reveals, and a point on which I will subsequently elaborate, that local politics and divisions with the Democratic Party remained at the forefront of the “anti-Dago” parade sentiment.⁸⁵ Still, their chosen rhetoric and means of persuasion remain significant in terms of how they attempted to delegitimize the Italian meeting.

Rendered a matter of citizenship and allegiance, according to the *Times* and the *Picayune*, what marked the meeting as fundamentally problematic was the fact that the participants organized as Italians: “They listened to speeches in their mother tongue, and then declared, not as American citizens, but as Italians, against a constitutional provision passed by our Legislature.”⁸⁶ Especially controversial was the

⁸³ “Sunday’s Italian Parade,” *Times Democrat*, 24 March 1896.

⁸⁴ “Citizens Not to Be Trusted,” *Daily Picayune*, 25 March 1896.

⁸⁵ Of note, and to account for the potential political biases of the New Orleans press, recall that the *Times* originated as an anti-lottery paper, which suggests that its editorship may have had connections to the Citizens League (or at least to their political leanings) (John Wilds, *Afternoon Story: A Century of the New Orleans States-Item* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976)). See also the footnotes regarding the political biases of the New Orleans press from Chapters 1 and 2. Yet, because both the *Times* and the *Picayune* included opinions that warned against “foreign” intervention into Louisiana politics (even though the *Picayune* was credited with maintaining a certain level of objectivity in their reporting), New Orleans press rhetoric may have been more representative of the commercial elite of New Orleans and the opinions of the Reform Democrats.

⁸⁶ “Sunday’s Italian Parade,” *Times Democrat*, 24 March 1896. As the *Times* warned, “The Italians’ assumed in this matter an attitude of dictation toward citizens of American descent and of other nationalities, which is offensive, and which will prove prejudicial to them.”

fact that they marched underneath an Italian flag.⁸⁷ Such a demonstration was considered a blasphemous “interfere[ence] into American politics.”⁸⁸ The *Picayune* explained that the act of parading beneath the Italian flag offered evidence to support amending the state’s suffrage and naturalization laws, which allowed foreign citizens the right to vote once they declared their intention to naturalize:

The only purpose [these laws] serve now is to enable a few politicians to control a certain foreign element, which is allowed the right of franchise on a simple declaration that they will become citizens of the state, and how long to you suppose they would remain here, if they manage to accumulate a few dollars? Why, they will go back to Italy, and there live in comparative luxury for the rest of their days.⁸⁹

In this regard and in contrast to rhetoric from the 1870s and 1880s, supporters of disenfranchisement invoked the long-standing stereotype and perception of the Italian immigrant as a temporary sojourner, a “Bird of Passage,” as fodder for suffrage constraints.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Scarpaci, “Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-1910,” 74.

⁸⁸ “Sunday’s Italian Parade,” *Times Democrat*, 24 March 1896.

⁸⁹ “Italian Regulars paraded by the Ring, After a Meeting at which No English was Spoken,” *Daily Picayune*, 23 March 1896. Nationally, a similar opinion was expressed in the *Washington Post*, as quoted in *Times Democrat*: “Italians never adopt American customs... “They remain isolated from the rest of any community in which they happen to dwell. They seldom learn to speak our tongue, they have no respect for our laws or our form of government, they are always foreigners. And now the Italian sojourners in New Orleans—excepting, of course, the few educated gentlemen of high social position, to whom none of these observations applies—are preparing for an excursion into local politics” (4 April 1896).

⁹⁰ As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, anti-Italian discourse emerged locally in the post-lynching era to justify the violence; similarly, the 1890s disenfranchisement debates adopted the common national anti-Italian rhetoric to legitimize voter restriction. Demonstrating the developing parallels between regional and northern press rhetoric, the *Times* reported that the national press concurred with their critical assessment of the Italian meeting. The *Washington Post* reported that the Italians in New Orleans were “getting ready to make themselves obnoxious again” (“The Late Italian Parade,” *Times Democrat*, 4 April 1896). They critiqued the meeting as indicative of the unassimilable tendencies of the Italian immigrants: “The Germans, the Irish, and others we might mention migrate to this country, adopt its customs, acquire its language, master its institutions, and identify themselves with its destiny. The Italians, never. They remain isolated from the rest of any community in which they happen to dwell. They seldom learn to speak our tongue, they have no respect for our laws or our form of government, they are always foreigners. And now the Italian sojourners in New Orleans...are preparing for an excursion into local politics. If they did this as individuals, as members of some party acting in concert with the others, there could be no objection. But such is not the case. They act as an Italian body only. Two thousand of them assembled in some hall last Sunday to listen to

Not only was this a question of loyalty and allegiance, the *Times Democrat* questioned the audacity of the group's organization beneath a "foreign flag" and rendered it an act of impudence, an "interference by a foreign body in the political affairs of an American city."⁹¹ As the *Times* explained, Italian citizens had the

right to express their views as Democrats or Republicans, as supporters of the regular Democrats or the Citizens' League, but when, as Italians, organized on the basis of nationality, they march beneath the Italian flag, and when they interfere in American politics, and tell us what kind of a Constitution, what systems of law and what suffrage is acceptable to them as Italians, they must arouse a very strong feeling against themselves.⁹²

The rhetoric of interference is significant here—marking the Italian meeting as outside of Louisiana politics rendered it on par with the "interference" of Reconstruction carpetbaggers. The invocation of the participants as "ignorant foreigners" in opposition to "purer politics and higher civilization" served to appropriate existing xenophobic and anti-Italian rhetoric in order to challenge the legitimacy of the Italian meeting and parade.⁹³

Underlying such references to political interference, the role of the "Regulars" and claims that the Italians "adopt[ed] a set of resolutions of which nine-tenths of them had not the slightest understanding," suggested that the reason the meeting was so objectionable went well beyond the fact that the group acted and organized as

Italian speeches from a few of their political padrones and to adopt a set of resolutions of which nine-tenths of them had not the slightest understanding"). Like the New Orleans press, this sentiment capitalized on the stereotypes of Italians as ignorant, foreign and unworthy of citizenship.

⁹¹ "The Late Italian Parade," *Times Democrat*, 4 April 1896.

⁹² "Sunday's Italian Parade," *Times Democrat*, 24 March 1896. More of the quote: "When he becomes naturalized he surrenders his allegiance to the King of Italy to accept American citizenship; he abandons the tricolor for the Stars and Stripes; he is an American citizen, no different from those of any other race, and to see him organizing on race lines and informing the people of Louisiana that such and such a provision in our Constitution is distasteful to him as an Italian is un-American and offensive in the highest degree."

⁹³ The Late Italian Parade," *Times Democrat*, 4 April 1896.

Italians.⁹⁴ As the *Washington Post* accused, their ire was additionally directed at the fact that local bosses were responsible for manipulating the Italian voters.⁹⁵ The press questioned the imprudence of “corralling a lot of dagoes and making such a display as that on the streets of this city.”⁹⁶ Thus, critics of the parade were even more incensed because the “Regulars,” who allegedly organized the meeting, “control the Italian vote” and “half of that crowd didn’t know a word of English.”⁹⁷ While the press blamed Italian immigrants for their willingness to participate in the parade—Italians citizens, organizing as Italians, speaking Italian, under an Italian flag, remained a dangerous precedence in defiance of Louisiana politics—the press additionally focused on the fact that the Italians had been manipulated by the Regulars.⁹⁸ In addition to the very real anxiety concerning the Italian-ness of the “Dago Parade,” the press’s anti-Italian rhetoric remained inextricably linked to their anti-Regular sentiment.

In addition to anxieties that the Regulars were manipulating the Italian vote, lawmakers in Louisiana seemed further concerned by the “Dago Parade” since the protest also represented a problem of labor control: “The Dago is destined in the near future to become an important factor in the labor problems of this State and the

⁹⁴ “The Late Italian Parade,” *Times Democrat*, 4 April 1896; “Citizens Not to Be Trusted,” *Daily Picayune*, 25 March 1896.

⁹⁵ As the *Post* continued, “Local bosses do not want the sphere of their influence contracted; naturally they are casting about for material of opposition, which can be contracted for and delivered like so much merchandise; naturally they turned first to the Italian contingent, which is both cheap and reliable in such enterprises” (Quoted in “The Late Italian Parade,” *Times Democrat*, 4 April 1896).

⁹⁶ The *Times*’s critique of the Regulars continued, “That is the worst break they ever made. The idea of! Why, it is an insult to the people. They could have effected just as much with the Italians by working quietly amongst them as they have always done, and avoided a great deal of criticism...positive disgrace to every American.” (“The Late Italian Parade,” *Times Democrat*, 4 April 1896).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ The New Orleans Italians have done themselves more harm than otherwise by lending themselves to this movement” (“The Late Italian Parade,” *Times Democrat*, 4 April 1896).

constitution makers should see to it that the lawless and illiterate foreign immigrant shall not be clothed with the power to become a disturbing element in our politics as well.”⁹⁹ The question of allowing “foreign immigrants” to vote, was for some New Orleanians, essentially a concern about controlling the laboring class—should the laboring class be involved in the state’s politics? Additionally, controlling the immigrant-voting constituency meant retaining authority over their labor. In order to exert and maintain control over this group of potentially volatile voters, critics argued that Italians were unfit for citizenship.

Beyond a question of labor and citizenship, the “Dago Parade” earned further criticism because of the perception that Italians marched in solidarity with African Americans against disenfranchisement. As previously mentioned, Scarpaci contended in her early work that there was little evidence to suggest that Italians and African Americans were striving for a common political goal.¹⁰⁰ Yet, in her later work, she claimed that Italians marched in solidarity with African Americans: “Italians joined with Populists to protest the disfranchisement of both themselves and African Americans.”¹⁰¹ However, there is little to suggest that Italians politically aligned themselves alongside African Americans in these disenfranchisement debates nor that Italians aligned themselves with the Populists, as parade banners focused primarily on linking the disenfranchisement of Italians to the since discredited principle of Know-Nothingism and appealing to their alliance with the Democratic Party. One sign held at the parade did allude to an interracial alliance: “We demand that the mechanic, the

⁹⁹ *Daily Advocate*, 24 December 1897.

¹⁰⁰ Scarpaci, *Italian Immigrants in Louisiana’s Sugar Parishes*.

¹⁰¹ Scarpaci, “Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-1910,” 74.

clerk and the laborer, white and black, have the same privilege to cast his ballot on election day as the millionaire.”¹⁰² While demanding the “same privilege” for “white and black” is striking, considering this was a singular reference, I read the rhetoric of this particular parade banner as more of an attempt to invoke a working-class mentality and a demand for rights in contrast to the “millionaire.”

Only on one other occasion did the *Picayune* write about a possible alliance between the New Orleans’s “colored clubs” and Italians. One speech at a “colored rally,” with over one thousand African Americans reportedly in attendance, proclaimed, “the Dagoes are with us...because the goody good people who had murdered them once, and might have murdered the negroes, would disfranchise them as they would disfranchise the negroes.”¹⁰³ Yet, this reported alliance appears more an assessment of the parallels in their protests, rather than an evaluation of a political coalition.

Moreover, despite an awareness of similar motives, certain opinions within the African American community actually voiced support for disenfranchising the Italians. P.J. Ellis, a “prominent negro delegates form the 14th ward,” explained,

The ring was voting against the amendment to save the Italian vote and the low people who could not even write. He personally would be glad to see the amendment passed for one reason, that it would get rid of this dago and low vote, and give an American negro an opportunity to

¹⁰² “The March of the Regulars,” *Daily Picayune*, 18 April 1896.

¹⁰³ “A Cage Rally. Colored Clubs Claim Kinship with the Ring’s Italians Display,” *Daily Picayune*, 24 March 1896. The speaker went on to say that “he was prepared to barter, dicker and trade with the devil if necessary to defeat the suffrage amendment...All the legislation jim crow car laws, miscegenation laws, suffrage amendments, etc., all originated with the goody goody people in the Democratic party.”

have a voice in the politics of America, and he would not be compelled to remain a background to foreigners.¹⁰⁴

According to Ellis, he would support “dago” disenfranchisement, since he constructed himself as more “American” than the foreign Italian. Thus marking “American-ness” as a prerequisite for voting, this offers evidence to support political division, rather than alliance, between African American and Italians.

Further affirming this lack of an interracial alliance, the Italian Club justified their opposition to the suffrage amendment on the grounds of their long-standing allegiance to the Democratic Party. Accordingly, they claimed, Italian immigrants deserved the right to vote, not only because of this party loyalty, but because they had “contributed to that success which assured home government to Louisiana.”¹⁰⁵ In other words, as the Italian Club claimed, they had been instrumental in wresting control away from Republicans and carpetbaggers and helping to reinstitute (white, Democratic) home rule in Louisiana—thus constructing themselves in opposition to the African American community. By appealing in terms of their allegiance to the Democratic Party and their contribution to native-born anti-Reconstruction politics, the Italian Club aligned themselves with the white-majority in Louisiana and positioned themselves as disenfranchisers, rather than the disenfranchised. Instead, in

¹⁰⁴ “The Colored Vote Growing Watchful,” *Daily Picayune*, 17 April 1896. Ellis continued, “If he had been born a white man in place of a negro he would join the other white men in any movement which would wipe this class of humanity out of politics.”

¹⁰⁵ “Mauberret’s Italians: Opposed to Suffrage Amendments and Independent Movements,” *Daily Picayune*, 25 February 1896. The Italian Club’s proclamation continued, “We denounce the recent attempt to legislate in favor of the classes as against the masses, which is attempted through the act of the last legislature, known as the suffrage amendment...We further denounce that amendment, because of its adoption by the delegates to the next legislature, under the pretense of amplifying the right to amend the constitution of this state on the question of the franchise without even consulting the people, all of which we submit, is undemocratic and contrary to the first principles of the party.”

line with Scarpaci's assessment that Italians practiced a form of calculated "self-sufficiency," the rhetoric of the Italian meeting and parade more overtly worked to represent themselves as members of the white-majority in Louisiana. In this sense, Italians marched to defend their own voting interests, although perceptions and assessments of their motives remained clouded at the time (and even now within the existing historiography). Because of Italian opposition to the suffrage amendment, their "self-sufficiency" may have been *read* as an alliance with African Americans (even if no such alliance actually existed), while such perceptions certainly contributed to the fears and concerns concerning Italian voting.

One could argue that constructing themselves as native, white "southerners," as well as emphasizing that Italians had economically and politically contributed to the state, was simply political pandering on the part of Italians working to position themselves in the most politically advantageous position possible.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, I do not claim this as evidence of genuine Italian-as-southerner identity, but unlike previous readings of this moment, I do suggest that Italians deliberately articulated themselves largely in opposition to African Americans.¹⁰⁷ Ultimately, the press criticism levied against the "Dago Parade" exploited questions of loyalty and citizenship and invoked existing xenophobic tropes in order to legitimize a fundamental political critique of bossism and the Regular Democrats. Because "the immigrant in Louisiana served the native white political machine," the immigrant

¹⁰⁶ This again presents evidence of Scarpaci's claim regarding Italians acting on behalf of their own "self-interest."

¹⁰⁷ This contrasts with both Cunningham and Scarpaci's readings of the 1896 parade that observed evidence of an Italian and African American coalition (Cunningham, "The Italian, a Hindrance to White Solidarity in Louisiana, 1890-1898"; Scarpaci, *Italian Immigrants in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes*).

bore the brunt of the anti-Regular politicizing.¹⁰⁸ Amidst these political controversies, Louisiana lawmakers deferred comprehensive action regarding suffrage in 1896, though they did pass a temporary voter registration law to limit suffrage; they additionally called for a constitutional convention in order to develop an official voting restriction policy to make the restriction permanent.¹⁰⁹

By 1898, voting reform and disfranchisement, in principle, still enjoyed relatively unanimous political support, though for different reasons among Louisiana legislators. Support for disenfranchisement resulted from lingering tension over the gubernatorial election of 1896 between Murphy J. Foster and John N. Pharr. The 1896 election between Foster, the Democrat, and Pharr, the Republican/Populist “fusion” candidate, resulted in Foster’s election, even amid widespread accusations of voter fraud.¹¹⁰ Foster, who received the majority of his votes from the black-belt parishes, was accused of securing the election through voter rigging, manipulation and violence that had suppressed the black Republican vote; for Democrats, disfranchisement was thus a legal means of validating the existing election practices of Foster’s camp.¹¹¹ Supporters of Pharr, a wealthy sugar planter from St. Mary parish who had campaigned as a reformer intent on eliminating voter fraud, election violence and a broken system, considered disfranchisement as a means of “clean[ing]

¹⁰⁸ Scarpaci, *Italian Immigrants in Louisiana’s Sugar Parishes*, 288.

¹⁰⁹ W. Lee Hargrave, *The Louisiana State Constitution* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Scarpaci, “Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-1910,” 74.

¹¹⁰ Despite the fact that Populists began to adopt white supremacist rhetoric after the election in 1894, they still brokered a deal with Republicans in 1896 and nominated a fusion candidate.

¹¹¹ “Foster’s majority in some parishes exceeded the number of registered voters,” (Scarpaci, *Italian Immigrants in Louisiana’s Sugar Parishes*, 281).

up politics.”¹¹² Thus, Republicans and Populists advocated “white supremacy” and the “elimination of the negro vote” as a means of eliminating political corruption and securing honest elections. As a result, Louisiana’s constitutional convention in 1898 was charged with revising the state’s suffrage ordinance.

The suffrage debate began with a question of whether voting was a privilege or an inherent right. Louisiana legislators appeared to understand the concept of suffrage as a privilege that needed to be earned as well as a privilege that could be revoked for misuse. In line with this principle, universal suffrage was considered “unwise, unreasonable and illogical.”¹¹³ In fact, the *Daily Picayune* claimed,

It is entirely proper to classify voters according to standards of intelligence, property and character... The safety of the State, the welfare of society, the suppression of corrupt and dishonest methods of carrying elections of the prevention of practices used in falsifying the results of elections, are good reasons for withdrawing the office or function of suffrage from any individuals to whom it was wrongly or improvidently given, or who habitually make a bad use of the power that had been improperly confided to them.”¹¹⁴

Accordingly, in the name of public safety, Louisianans considered disfranchisement as a necessary protection.

¹¹² Michael Lanza, “Little More than a Family Matter: The Constitution of 1898,” in *In Search of Fundamental Law: Louisiana’s Constitutions, 1812-1974*, ed. Warren M Billings and Edward F Haas (Lafayette, La.: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1993), 97. As Lanza confirms, Democratic legislators touted disfranchisement as a means to “produce honesty in elections and insure Democratic harmony and hegemony, as well as white supremacy” (98). Italian immigrants generally voted for Foster, even though Foster was responsible for proposing the suffrage and even though Pharr supported an anti-lynching campaign, which would have appealed to Italians. In part, Italian support for Foster had to do with the fact that Foster’s suffrage limitation was directed at African Americans, not immigrants, as well as the fact that the urban political machine delivered the Italian vote on behalf of the “regulars” (Scarpaci, *Italian Immigrants in Louisiana’s Sugar Parishes*).

¹¹³ “As to Suffrage,” *Daily Picayune*, 6 February 1898.

¹¹⁴ “The Suffrage Franchise,” *Daily Picayune*, 16 February 1898. The *Picayune* noted that although suffrage could not be deprived because of “race, color or previous condition...this office or agency having been conferred under certain circumstances or for reasons, may be taken away under justifying circumstances or for good reasons.”

But, how far would disenfranchisement go and what would the ensuing restrictions mean for the “foreign vote?” On par with the 1896 debate, legislators in 1898 still believed that the foreign vote was being exercised fraudulently, since as per the 1879 constitution, a foreigner needed only to reside in the state for one year, declare his intent to become a citizen, and he could vote in state elections. As a result, “there [was] no legal obligation resting on him ever to become a citizen,” which meant that, allegedly, unassimilated, foreign citizens were freely voting in Louisiana state elections.¹¹⁵ Thus, the voting rights of immigrants and “foreigners,” unlike the disenfranchisement debates of the same era that took place in Mississippi and South Carolina, remained an active part of considerations in Louisiana. According to the *Daily Picayune*, the purpose of voter reform was “to take the power to vote out of the hands, first, of the ignorant and shiftless classes, and, second, out of the hands of foreigners.”¹¹⁶ The *Times Democrat* proclaimed voter reform necessary in order to “secure white supremacy for all time in Louisiana and to assure honest elections and put an end to the frauds which have so long debauched the public sense of the State.”¹¹⁷ Because Louisiana legislators and the New Orleans press articulated their concern as a fear of foreigners participating in state politics, their anxiety concerning

¹¹⁵ *Daily Picayune*, 23 January 1898.

¹¹⁶ “Constitutional Convention,” *Daily Picayune*, 23 January 1898. As the *Daily Picayune* continued, “With a negro population embracing quite one-half the total of the people in the State, almost wholly ignorant and as shiftless as mentally benighted, but armed with the ballot, the State is perpetually overshadowed politically by a black and menacing cloud.”

¹¹⁷ “The Illiterate White Voter,” *Times Democrat*, 25 March 1898. The *Daily Picayune* proclaimed that if the state’s suffrage laws were not revised, “they will demonstrate to the world that their political methods are dishonest, and a corrupt and degraded mass of voters for sale to the highest bidder furnishes the means by which their great commonwealth is controlled” (“The Wrong of Negro Suffrage Must Be Remedied,” 1 January 1898). Similarly, the need for voting reform was linked to a desire for honest elections and the elimination of corruption: “What is earnestly wanted in Louisiana, is that the political system shall be so purified as that the elections for public officials and representatives of all sorts shall be honest” (“The Convention and the Suffrage Question,” *Daily Picayune*, 9 February 1898).

citizenship and who possessed the rightful credentials for citizenship remained closely tied to the question of suffrage throughout the ensuing debate. Yet, despite bipartisan support for voter reform and universal support in the principle of disfranchisement, there was little consensus concerning *how* Louisiana should approach a suffrage amendment and *who* exactly should be included among the disfranchised.¹¹⁸

Louisiana's suffrage amendment as originally drafted (in 1896) proposed that voting would be restricted "to any adult male who could read the constitution in his native tongue or who owned property assessed at least at \$200... If the voters approved the amendment, the legislature could rewrite [the amendment] in any way it chose."¹¹⁹ At the time, although Democrats generally favored the proposed voting restrictions (while Republicans were generally against the proposed iteration), Democratic ward bosses, who did not want to alienate their constituents, opposed the amendment; this suggested a continued lack of white Democrat solidarity in the methods and means of disfranchisement.¹²⁰ The disenfranchisement debates that subsequently raged at the convention and within the New Orleans and state press reveal insight into the state of internal politics of Louisiana.

¹¹⁸ As the *Daily Picayune* noted, suffrage was not a natural right, but "an office or title to exercise a function, and this title must come from a grant or gift of power" ("As to Suffrage," 6 February 1898).

¹¹⁹ Lanza, "Little More than a Family Matter: The Constitution of 1898," 96. Lanza, "Little More than a Family Matter: The Constitution of 1898."

¹²⁰ Lanza, "Little More than a Family Matter: The Constitution of 1898." Lanza additionally suggests that *white* opposition to the suffrage amendment explains the timing of the constitutional convention, since the amendment in 1896 (before the 1896 elections) lacked the necessary political backing and was voted down.

Accordingly, it was no longer a matter of “cheating the negro out of his vote, but white man tried to rob white man, it became evident that there had to be a stop put to the unlawful elections, and so with the progress of the times, the ingenuity of man has devised various ways around that fourteenth amendment. The brightest men in the state of Louisiana will soon be at work on a project which will insure honest elections, and place and secure the suffrage in the hands of the intelligent white voters of the state” (Daily Picayune, 1898).¹²¹

1898 Constitutional Convention: Debate over the Suffrage Proposal

Louisiana convened its 1898 constitutional convention in January—no blacks, four foreign-born, 120 southern and ten transplanted northerners represented the state.¹²² According to the President of the Convention, Ernest B. Kruttschnitt, the convention had been called for only one reason: “to eliminate from the electorate the mass of corrupt and illiterate voters who have during the last quarter of a century degraded our politics.”¹²³ Drafting their suffrage articles in the wake of Mississippi and South Carolina, “the leading Democrats of this State” endeavored, so they claimed, to “eliminate as many negroes as possible, not through any spirit of hatred for the negroes, but out of a desire to insure the absolute rule of the white race for his own good.”¹²⁴

¹²¹ “Constitutions Past and Present,” *Daily Picayune*, 6 February 1898.

¹²² Lanza, “Little More than a Family Matter: The Constitution of 1898.” Four foreign-born were in attendance at the convention: Patrick Danahy (a planter born in Ireland), Thos R. Richardson (born in Ireland and moved to New Orleans in 1871; he joined the White League in 1874), I.D. Moore (a lawyer born in the British West Indies) and William Driebholz (born in Germany in 1838 and moved to New Orleans in 1856) (Democratic Party (Louisiana) State Central Committee, *The Convention of '98*).

¹²³ Kruttschnitt, quoted in Democratic Party (La.) State Central Committee, *The Convention of '98*, 15. Of special significance, Kruttschnitt later specified that the “corrupt and illiterate” whom he spoke of were the “ignorant and corrupt delegations of Southern negroes.”

¹²⁴ R.B. Dawkins of Union, quoted in *Daily Picayune*, 16 March 1898. Explicitly characterizing the work of the convention as motivated by white supremacy, the *Daily Picayune* reported, “The white people of Louisiana are at this moment engaged in the work of saving their State from the black flood of ignorance, shiftlessness and moral and mental unfitness for the exercise of political power that was poured out upon it in the form of negro suffrage” (“The Right of Louisiana to Reform its Suffrage,” 20 February 1898). President Kruttschnitt expressed a similar sentiment in his opening address: “Let us say to the large class of the people of Louisiana who will be disfranchised under any of the proposed limitations of the suffrage, that what we seek to do is undertaken in spirit, not of hostility to any particular men, or set of men, but in the belief that the State should see to the protection of the weaker classes; should guard them against the machinations of those who would use them only to further their own base ends: should see to it that they be not allowed to harm themselves. We owe it to the ignorant, we owe it to the weak, to protect them just as

The convention considered a variety of suffrage proposals and strategies, some less controversial than others. The legislators generally supported the establishment of an Australian ballot (secret voting), a biennial registration requirement and voting supervision by commissioners. The New Orleans press confirmed support for the Australian ballot through their editorials, which proclaimed that the Australian ballot would “cut off the dangerous phalanx of ignorant negro suffragans, who would swarm around the polls holding out a corrupt and purchasable balance of power.”¹²⁵ Letters to the editor also confirmed public support for the Australian ballot’s ability to “eliminate the negro vote.”¹²⁶

More controversial, however, were the suggestions of an “understanding clause,” a poll tax, and the legalization of the 1897 voter registration list. The convention quickly dismissed the 1897 registration lists, on the basis that the suffrage rolls had been fraudulently produced and because “illiterate negroes” had been registered.¹²⁷ The poll tax provision, although a protracted feature of the debates, eventually won over some of its initial opponents, as opposition was grounded more in a question of whether it was a necessary or superfluous inclusion.¹²⁸ Convention legislators, at least originally, collectively rejected the “understanding clause,” later dubbed the South Carolina plan. The “understanding clause,” included in both South Carolina and Mississippi’s suffrage plans, required a voter to demonstrate to

we would protect a little child and prevent it from injuring itself with sharp-edged tools placed in its hands” (15).

¹²⁵ “Strong Defense of the Australian Ballot; Too Ignorant to Mark it Ought to be Disfranchised,” *Times Democrat*, 2 March 1898.

¹²⁶ Letter to the Editor, *Times Democrat*, 3 March 1898.

¹²⁷ Editorial, *Times Democrat*, 1 March 1898.

¹²⁸ I will provide a more in depth discussion of the poll tax debates subsequently.

registrars their understanding of the Constitution.¹²⁹ As the New Orleans press proclaimed, such a clause placed far too much control in the hands of registrars over who was entitled and who was denied the right to vote. The *Times Democrat* went as far as saying that through the power of the “understanding clause,” registrars were granted the same authority as “Latin American dictators.”¹³⁰ The *Daily Picayune* noted, “Any clause permitting voters to be registered on condition that if they cannot read, they can understand the constitution if read to them, would place it in the power of the official charged with enforcing the understanding clause to pack the registration lists, and thereby the poll books at his pleasure, with persons not qualified, or to exclude from the franchise any whom he might choose.”¹³¹ Because of the perception of this arbitrarily awarded power, the “understanding clause” was discarded as “a subterfuge to get in certain voters and keep out others.”¹³² Ultimately, the Suffrage Committee was tasked with drafting a constitutional suffrage provision that would “assure white supremacy and good government.”¹³³ As Kruttschnitt charged: “May this hall where, thirty-two years ago, the negro first entered upon the unequal contest for supremacy, and which has been reddened with his blood, now

¹²⁹ Thomas Adams Upchurch, *Legislating Racism: The Billion Dollar Congress and the Birth of Jim Crow* (University Press of Kentucky, 2004). As Upchurch explains, the “understanding clause” would allow illiterate whites, upon giving a ‘reasonable’ interpretation of some passage of the new constitution, to vote. Blacks would be disallowed based upon their rendering what white pollers would have predetermined to be an incorrect interpretation...[It] could be strictly enforced for blacks and laxly enforced for whites” (117-18).

¹³⁰ Editorial, *Times Democrat*, 1 March 1898. Similarly, the *Picayune* concurred, registrars or election officials would create “a dictator who will have the right to say whether or not any citizen shall be authorized to vote” (“The Suffrage Franchise,” *Daily Picayune*, 16 February 1898). Ultimately, the *Picayune* worried, the “understanding clause” would undermine the state’s ability to “secure honest elections by properly qualified voters,” and provide a means “for falsifying the elections [and] for violating the will of those who cast ballots” (“The Suffrage Franchise,” *Daily Picayune*, 16 February 1898).

¹³¹ “The Suffrage Franchise,” *Daily Picayune*, 16 February 1898.

¹³² Editorial, *Times Democrat*, 1 March 1898.

¹³³ “The Suffrage,” *Times Democrat*, 11 March 1898.

witness the evolution of our organic law which will establish the relations between the races upon an everlasting foundation of right and justice.”¹³⁴

Under the chairmanship of General Bell, the Suffrage Committee developed and submitted their proposed voting ordinance, the main premise of which was an educational qualification or literacy test (in one’s native language); within the convention, as within the Louisiana press, this general premise of the proposal held widespread support.¹³⁵ However, for those who were unable to meet the educational qualification, the committee included a series of additional entitlements for the franchise: if a voter did not meet the educational qualification, they were still eligible to vote if they owned \$300 in property; if their wife owned property, if their child owned property, if they were registered to vote in 1868, if they were not registered to vote in 1868 but would have qualified to register, if their father or grandfather were either registered in 1868 or could have been, or, if they were foreign-born but naturalized before the Constitution was adopted.¹³⁶

Once it was announced, the response from the New Orleans press on the suffrage ordinance was mixed. The *Daily Picayune* favored the policy of “enfranchising all who were voters” before 1868.¹³⁷ They additionally advocated on behalf of the constitutionality of the exclusions and allowances in the proposal since

¹³⁴ Democratic Party (La.) State Central Committee, *The Convention of '98*, 16.

¹³⁵ Bell was a lawyer in Shreveport (Democratic Party (La.) State Central Committee, *The Convention of '98*).

¹³⁶ This foreign-born exemption was first reported in the New Orleans press on 24 February 1898, which the *Daily Picayune* referred to as “The Weeks Suffrage Plan.” Named for Edward T. Weeks, who was not actually a member of the convention or the Suffrage Committee, who was a lawyer and member of a prominent family from New Iberia parish (William Alexander Mabry, “Louisiana Politics and the ‘Grandfather Clause,’” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 13, no. 4 (October 1936): 290–320; Weeks Family Papers, 1771-1979, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University Special Collections)).

¹³⁷ “Text of the Suffrage Plan Prepared by the Sub-Committee of Six,” *Daily Picayune*, 2 March 1898.

they were not based on race: “The fact that a larger proportion of one race happens to come under the provisions of the suffrage law than do of the other race could not cause it to be construed as in conflict with the provisions of the fourteenth amendment.”¹³⁸ As the *Picayune* reasoned, an “accident of circumstances,” not a violation of the fourteenth amendment would lead to the desired disenfranchisement results. By and large, and at least initially, the *Picayune* supported the proposed suffrage proposal.

The *Times Democrat* supported the educational and property provision; however, beyond the basic premise, they called the ordinance a “Monstrous Suffrage Plan” and railed against the plan’s numerous exemptions.¹³⁹ One of their main contentions, subsequently a source of derision and ridicule throughout the New Orleans (and regional) press, was dubbed the “Squaw Voter” and the “Papoose Voter.” The *Times Democrat* described the provisions as both farcical and dangerous, as they explained that the “Squaw Voter” clause allowed an “unspeakable thing in breeches” to vote simply because his wife owned property.¹⁴⁰ The Papoose Voter, a member of the otherwise “prohibited classes,” was a “degenerate” who was only able to vote because his child owned property.¹⁴¹ In fact, press discourse considered these

¹³⁸ “Correspondence Which Speaks for Itself,” *Daily Picayune*, 24 February 1898.

¹³⁹ In part, this divided reaction within the press may have been the result of the *Times’s* connection to the Citizens League and their efforts to combat the urban political regime that relied on the immigrant voting bloc. See John Wilds, *Afternoon Story: A Century of the New Orleans States-Item* and previous footnotes on the topic.

¹⁴⁰ According to the *Times Democrat*, the clause was borrowed from the Cherokee where “any white man who marries a full-blooded Cherokee squaw is called a Squaw Man...and is entitled to an interest in the Cherokee property and to vote in Cherokee elections because he is the husband of his wife” (6 March 1898).

¹⁴¹ “Insult to Native-Born Citizens,” *Times Democrat*, 5 March 1898. This clause included a provision that specified that the “Papoose Voter” would be disfranchised when his minor child turned twenty-one. Although less they presented a less virulent critique, the *Daily Picayune* invoked the same critical epithet of “Squaw” and “Papoose” Voter

“electoral monstrosities” so problematic that the convention would eventually eliminate them from their final version of the suffrage ordinance.

The most reprehensible section of the proposed suffrage ordinance, at least according to the *Times Democrat*, was Section 5, which included the “Hereditary [or 1868] Voter” exemption. The stated intention behind the “1868 voter” provision was to preserve the franchise for Civil War veterans. The premise of enfranchising veterans, despite some inclination and desire to only enfranchise Confederate veterans, was generally favored in the New Orleans and regional press. Yet, because the clause granted suffrage to all those *eligible* to vote in 1868, whether or not they had actually registered or exercised their voting privilege, the *Times* mocked the ordinance for enfranchising “the Could have Been Voter—the fellow who might have voted in 1868 but did not think it worth while.”¹⁴² Additionally controversial was the fact that the right to vote was granted to those who were descendants of someone who voted or who was entitled to vote in 1868, thus enfranchising by “right of descent.” The *Times* admonished the convention for granting “degenerates” the right to “vote on inheritance,” and for creating a “monstrosity and absurdity” who is unfit to vote “but enjoys the franchise because some ancestor of his was a voter...or might have been a voter then if he had thought it worth his while to get registered.”¹⁴³

Section 5 was even more objectionable due to the provision that read as follows: “No male person of foreign birth, who shall have been naturalized prior to the adoption of this constitution, shall ever be denied the right to register and vote in

¹⁴² “Monstrous Suffrage Plan,” *Times Democrat*, 3 March 1898.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

this state by reason of his failure to possess the educational or property qualifications prescribed by this constitution.”¹⁴⁴ In response, the *Times Democrat* exploded with indignation, denouncing the exemption as “distinctly unamerican [sic],” which created “the ‘privileged dago’ voter and gives persons born abroad privileges denied natives of Louisianans.”¹⁴⁵ An “insult,” an “injustice,” a “scandal,” the *Times* maintained that the provision was a “glaring show of partiality in favor of the illiterate and naturalized foreigner as against the illiterate of native birth.”¹⁴⁶ Certain delegates at the convention concurred with this assessment and reportedly considered the exemption as “not only wrong in principle, injurious in effect, but distinctly and emphatically unconstitutional.”¹⁴⁷ According to the *Times*, the convention’s exemptions had created a series of “electoral freaks and monstrosities.”¹⁴⁸

Despite the assessment of the *Times*, there was not, in fact, universal condemnation of the suffrage ordinance. The *Picayune* considered the proposal a “compromise measure” and a “fairly good proposition,” wherein the only major dispute they identified was over the poll tax.¹⁴⁹ The *Picayune*’s assessment of Section 5 was also more moderated and tempered. They noted that the proposed ordinance rectified the problem with the current (1879) constitution: “Any foreigner [could] vote merely upon declaring an intention to become a citizen.”¹⁵⁰ As a result, the

¹⁴⁴ “Text of the Suffrage Plan Prepared by the Sub-Committee of Six; The Weeks Plans of Enfranchising All Who Were Voters,” *Daily Picayune*, 2 March 1898.

¹⁴⁵ Insult to Native Citizens,” *Times Democrat*, 8 March 1898; Editorial, *Times Democrat*, 7 March 1898.

¹⁴⁶ “Monstrous Suffrage Plan,” 3 March 1898; “Insult to Native-Born Citizens,” 5 March 1898; “Insult to Native Citizens,” 6 March 1898.

¹⁴⁷ “The Debate on the Suffrage,” *Times Democrat*, 9 March 1898.

¹⁴⁸ Editorial, *Times Democrat*, 7 March 1898.

¹⁴⁹ “Suffrage Report Up for Discussion,” *Daily Picayune*, 5 March 1898.

¹⁵⁰ “The Suffrage Franchise as to Foreigners,” *Daily Picayune*, 2 March 1898.

Picayune proclaimed,

Many thousands of such persons have been vested with the election franchise for the purpose of carrying elections for this or that political boss, when they had no honest desire or actual intention to become citizens, never have become so, but being foreigners, holding foreign allegiance, they continue to hold and exercise the power to vote in Louisiana elections.¹⁵¹

Therefore, the *Picayune* suggested that the suffrage ordinance included a necessary and noteworthy revision to current policy. In contrast to the *Times*, the *Picayune* advocated against any anxiety over the foreign-born clause, since the franchise would not be permitted to those who only declared their intention to become citizens.

Accordingly, “The naturalized citizen is accorded the same rights and privileges as are given to those born on the soil, but certainly no more.”¹⁵² The *Picayune* concluded that they were “disposed to believe that the result that has been given to the public is about as satisfactory as can be obtained.”¹⁵³ The polarizing opinions represented in the *Times* and the *Picayune*, speak to the debate that raged between the Ring and the Regulars for the next month. Certain convention delegates focused their attention on the advantages and disadvantages of a poll tax; others attempted to reintroduce the “understanding clause.” However, the crux of these concerns remained Section 5 and the bitterest debate at the convention raged over the question of the right of the foreign-born to vote in Louisiana.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² “The Suffrage Plan Born,” *Daily Picayune*, 4 March 1898.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

1898 Constitutional Convention: The “Privileged Dago” Clause

Certain opinions remained relatively unconcerned with the foreign-born exemption in Section 5, in part, because, as the *Daily Picayune* pointed out, few foreigners had naturalized and therefore the exception would allow few foreign-born to vote.¹⁵⁴ As the chairman of the Suffrage Committee, General Bell, explained,

The committee is not conscious of having committed a blunder that some of the members of the convention seem to think. We are accused of discriminating in favor of the foreign born as against the native born. We are careful not to discriminate against him. We put him on the same plane as the native born. We refused to disfranchise the foreign born citizen who has complied with the naturalization laws.¹⁵⁵

Bell and the Suffrage Committee reasoned, the foreign-born allowance was a means to enfranchise those naturalized foreigners who would otherwise not fall under the 1868 provision, thus, putting him “on the same plane as the native born citizen.”¹⁵⁶

The *Times Democrat*, on the other hand, was unrepentant in their critique of Section 5, which they argued had been passed by partisan interests and factional support.¹⁵⁷ The *Times* railed against the “foreign vote” and proclaimed, “all voters...who are not Americans, and have no intention of becoming so, should not be permitted to be voters.”¹⁵⁸ They read Section 5 as providing foreigners with special privileges “which gives them greater rights than natives enjoy and which will fasten

¹⁵⁴ “Foreign Voters,” *Daily Picayune*, 5 March 1898.

¹⁵⁵ “Suffrage Report Up for Discussion,” *Daily Picayune*, 5 March 1898.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ “Monstrous Suffrage Plan,” *Times Democrat*, 3 March 1898. The *Times* specified the Italian as the main beneficiary of this exemption: “Look at section 5, for instance, which makes permanent citizens of every naturalized Italian of this city, whether fit for the suffrage or not, whether literate or illiterate, whether owning property or a pauper.”

¹⁵⁸ “Monstrous Suffrage Plan,” *Times Democrat*, 3 March 1898; “Our Voters,” *Times Democrat*, 6 March 1898.

many thousand illiterate foreigners on our electorate.”¹⁵⁹ They linked “tramps” with “illiterate foreigners” and marked them as unfit and undeserving of the franchise:

One’s gorge so rises at the attempt to force 5000 or 6000 ignorant voters upon this city simply because they are foreigners to the exclusion of native born illiterates, who have forgotten more about the institutions and the genius of republican government than these ignorant foreign born voters, who can neither read American literature nor comprehend American speakers, can ever acquire—one’s gorge so rises at this attempt that language is inadequate.¹⁶⁰

According to the *Times*, the foreign-born allowance extended the franchise privilege above and beyond those rights offered to native-born. “Language [was] inadequate” to convey the extent that certain New Orleanians perceived this allowance as a deprivation to the rights of native-born. As in 1896, and a point to which I will subsequently return, critics of foreign-born voting capitalized on existing xenophobic tropes and nativist fears, in order to attack that which gave their political opponents an electoral advantage.

The *Daily Picayune* did print a letter to the editor later that same week which, in contrast to the editorial opinion of the *Picayune*, went on to critique Section 5 in similar terms as the *Times*: “Considering how few Italians ever appreciate the genius of our institutions, even when they own property and can read and write, they ought not to be trusted with the ballot unless they have education or property.”¹⁶¹ The *Picayune* responded by saying they had not noticed that the exemption in Section 5

¹⁵⁹ Editorial, *Times Democrat*, 4 March 1898. As the article continued, “We see no reason why these foreigners should not be bound by the same conditions of literacy or the ownership of property as is required of the native citizen of Louisiana.”

¹⁶⁰ Editorial, *Times Democrat*, 4 March 1898; “Insult to Native Born,” *Times Democrat*, 5 March 1898.

¹⁶¹ “White Foreigners Should Not Have Superior Privileges Over White Natives,” *Daily Picayune*, 7 March 1898. The letter additionally noted, “I say Italians because the great percentage of ignorant foreign voters is Italian; the other nationalities can read and write.”

provided foreigners with privileges beyond those allowed to native-born. They went on to say, if the opinion in the letter was correct, the convention had committed an outrage, and “a manifest injustice has been done in setting up foreigners over the native-born sons of foreigners.”¹⁶² Similarly, parishes around Louisiana began to demonstrate their discontent with the ordinance through mass-meetings and protests: Acadia Parish denounced Section 5 as “un-American” and proclaimed it an “insult and slap in the face to every native-born citizen.”¹⁶³ Avoyelles protested the suffrage ordinance as an “insult,” and “nefarious and iniquitous measure, full of contamination and bossism.”¹⁶⁴ Despite the *Times*’s contention, “opposition” to the suffrage amendment was not monolithically motivated and varied across regions.

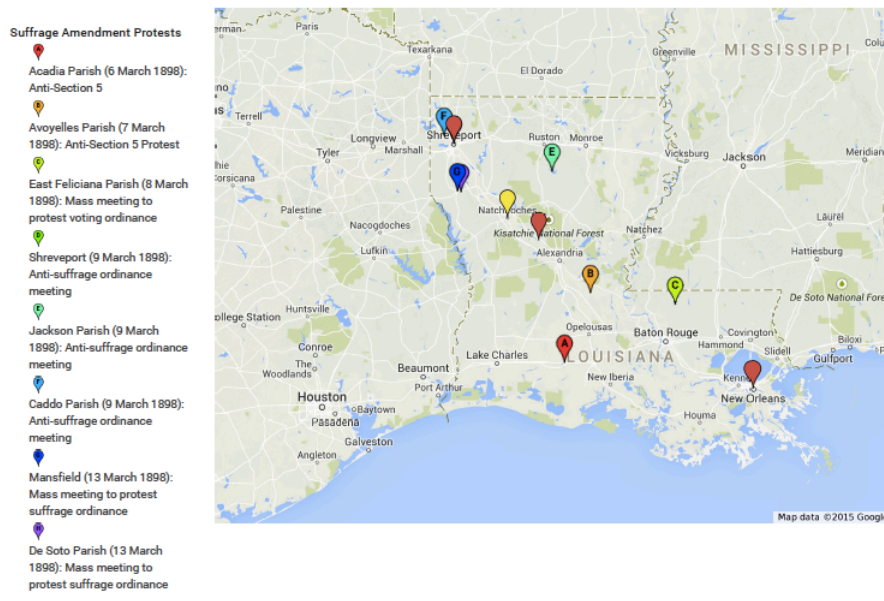
As the map on the next page shows, disenfranchisement debates raged across Louisiana during the first two weeks of March in 1898. Red, unlettered bubbles denote demonstrations in favor of the suffrage amendment (Colfax, Shreveport, New Orleans), while the alphabetically labeled, multi-colored bubbles represent meetings in protest of either Section 5 of the suffrage amendment or the entire suffrage amendment, also geographically (Acadia Parish, Avoyelles Parish, East Feliciana Parish, Shreveport, Jackson Parish, Caddo Parish, Mansfield and De Soto Parish). Significantly, neither support nor opposition for the suffrage amendment was geographically confined, though support for the amendment was definitely strongest in and around New Orleans and the backland parishes, while opposition spanned both black belt parishes and sugar parishes.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Quoted in “Insult to our Native Citizens,” *Times Democrat*, 6 March 1898.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in *Times Democrat*, 7 March 1898.

Disenfranchisement Debates in Louisiana (1898)



165

Just days after its initial announcement, the *Daily Picayune* reported “The Suffrage Clause Vastly Improved.” They explained that the Suffrage Committee had amended Section 5 so that only foreigners who naturalized as of January 1, 1898 would be granted the right to vote outside the educational and property requirement.¹⁶⁶ In fact, convention delegate John St. Paul of Orleans, “one of the foremost young attorneys in New Orleans,” reported that since the establishment of the 1879 constitution, which permitted foreigners the right to vote upon their declaration of intent to become a citizen, only 1189 had actually naturalized as citizens in Louisiana.¹⁶⁷ Based on St. Paul’s estimate, “ten times that number have

¹⁶⁵ Jessica Barbata Jackson, “Disenfranchisement Debates in Louisiana,” Map. *Google Maps*. Google, 19 October 2016.

¹⁶⁶ “The Suffrage Clause Vastly Improved,” *Daily Picayune*, 8 March 1898.

¹⁶⁷ Democratic Party (La.) State Central Committee, *The Convention of ’98*; “The Suffrage Clause Vastly Improved,” *Daily Picayune*, 8 March 1898.

been voting under the present constitution without discarding allegiance to foreign kings, princes and potentates.”¹⁶⁸ He explained that Section 5 served to remedy this flagrant abuse, since it “cut off the thousands of ignorant incomers of the lowest class from the purlieus of Europe, who, although not making any claim to be citizens, have been for years marched to the polls as so many dumb cattle and voted at the command of the bosses.”¹⁶⁹ Additionally, St. Paul reasoned, the clause would enfranchise only a relatively small number of foreigners. While the convention records described him as actively working for “a law that would allow every white man to vote, whether he came from the clubs or the slums,” St. Paul’s efforts seem to contradict this contention.¹⁷⁰ Rather than universally understanding all foreigners or all Italians as problematic voters, St. Paul defended the foreign-born voting allowance in order to preserve a class-based voting condition; notably, he considered foreigners who did not herald from the “lowest class from the purlieus of Europe” as eligible “white” voters.

Similarly, Dr. Henry Dickson Bruns of Orleans, a leader among “all [New Orleanian] political reform associations” reported that although Section 5 was originally offensive, “the sting has so thoroughly been drawn, the committee has so qualified it, that it is hardly worth debating.”¹⁷¹ Because the amended section also required five years of residency in the state and only applied to those foreigners who

¹⁶⁸ “The Suffrage Clause Vastly Improved,” *Daily Picayune*, 8 March 1898.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Democratic Party (La.) State Central Committee, *The Convention of '98*, 23.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 18. Convention records also noted that Bruns was the founder of the Young Men’s Democratic Association and had performed a special study on ballot reform. His quote was taken from the *Daily Picayune*, 11 March 1898.

had already naturalized as of January 1, 1898, “the proposition became scarcely worth debating or even commenting on.”¹⁷² Furthermore, the convention concluded that those qualified foreign-born who wished to vote outside of the educational and property requirement would be required to register by September 1, 1898.¹⁷³ Upon these revisions, the *Daily Picayune* dropped any sort of criticism of Section 5.

Despite the revisions and amendments, the *Times* railed on and accused the Suffrage Committee of carelessness and admitted that although Section 5 was less offensive, it “retained most of the worst features of the original ordinance.”¹⁷⁴ “It does not cure its inherent and insuperable defect—the fact that it grants foreigners privileges which it denies to native. Even amended and re-amended as it has been, it gives the electoral franchise to illiterate persons if born in Italy while it denies it to those born in the United States.”¹⁷⁵ The *Times* eagerly reported on the continued protests around the state: East Feliciana joined the mass meeting protests, denouncing the ordinance as “an outrage to the native voter, unjust, undemocratic, and repugnant to the people of Louisiana.”¹⁷⁶ They proclaimed the ordinance an “attempted assault on the dignity of American citizenship.”¹⁷⁷ Shreveport, Jackson and Caddo Parishes also went on to hold anti-suffrage ordinance meetings on the premise that the “committee had failed to meet the expectation of the people” and that the “Privileged

¹⁷² *Daily Picayune*, 11 March 1898.

¹⁷³ “No person shall be entitled to register under this section after said date” (“Section Five is Now Remodeled,” *Daily Picayune*, 15 March 1898).

¹⁷⁴ “The Suffrage Committee,” *Times Democrat*, 15 March 1898. Here, the *Times* first reported that the Suffrage Committee dropped the Squaw/Papoose voters provisions.

¹⁷⁵ “The Privileged ‘Dago Voter,’” *Times Democrat*, 8 March 1898.

¹⁷⁶ Quoted in “Popular Protests,” *Times Democrat*, 8 March 1898. East Feliciana, a rural Louisiana parish, is located north of Baton Rouge along the Mississippi border.

¹⁷⁷ “More Protests,” *Times Democrat*, 9 March 1898.

Dago Voter” was undemocratic.¹⁷⁸ De Soto Parish held a mass meeting to protest the suffrage ordinance condemning the concept of inheriting the franchise as “unrepublican.”¹⁷⁹ The *Times* claimed that no meeting anywhere in the state had been held in defense of the suffrage committee.

The regional press corroborated the assessment of the *Times*, reflecting the fact that opinions across the state questioned the legitimacy of the Section 5 and the “Privileged Dago” Clause. The *Shreveport Caucasian* reported that Section 5 enfranchised “series of misfits” and resulted in a satire, a travesty on honest and fair suffrage qualification, an unintentional affront to every intelligent citizen of the State.¹⁸⁰ The *Shreveport Times* noted that the “most objectionable” section of the ordinance was the enfranchisement of “ignorant descendants of the voters of 1868 [and] foreigners who know naught of the government or its blessings,” especially in the face of disfranchising “white native born who have been deprived of educational facilities.”¹⁸¹ The *Baton Rouge Bulletin* advocated on behalf of the poll tax, which they felt would “relegate to the rear a mass of undesirable, corrupt voters—principally negroes [and] Dagoes.”¹⁸² Across the state and with varying degrees of acerbity, Louisianans opposed the “Privilege Dago Clause.”

Beyond the ostensible claims, what additionally prompted this virulence?

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. By and large, these protests occurred in the more rural parishes: Shreveport, located in north-western Louisiana, Jackson, located in north-central Louisiana, and Caddo, located in the north-western corner of Louisiana along the Texas border.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in *Times Democrat*, 13 March 1898. De Soto Parish is located on the western/Texas border of Louisiana, just South of Shreveport.

¹⁸⁰ “The Tide of Opposition Rising,” *Times Democrat*, 10 March 1898.

¹⁸¹ “Louisiana Opinions, What the Newspapers of this Great State Have Said on Subjects of Public Interest and General Importance,” *Daily Picayune*, 15 March 1898.

¹⁸² Ibid.

Within this debate, what factors have been left unexplored? In order to address these questions, recall that the debates in March of 1898 were effectively split between two different discourses, one expressed in terms of “foreign-born” versus “native-born,” the other articulated in terms of “black” and “white.” As the *Times* noted, “The suffrage question... has two sides—a white and a negro side.”¹⁸³

Of these two discourses, the latter focused solely on disfranchising the “negro” vote, while Italian or foreign “whiteness” was absent from their discussion. For example, Mr. Montgomery of Madison (a planter and Confederate veteran who resided in a black belt parish in northeast Louisiana) identified Section 5 as a means of self-preservation in the name of the “Caucasian enterprise,” because “the negro vote, as a race, showed a lack of fitness for that high privilege, and so far has demonstrated an insufficient amount of moral and educational development to appreciate and understand the duties of citizenship.”¹⁸⁴ He went on to elaborate that illiterate whites made better voters than the “average negro,” because

the former is, by hereditary traits a representative of the conquering and civilizing race, and the latter the representative of a race that has so far utterly failed to accomplish a civilization in any land or clime. I would rather trust the instincts of the Caucasian voter, associated with the intelligence of his community, unlettered though he may be, to the slightly educated negro linked to his race habits and traditions.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ “The Negro Vote,” *Times Democrat*, 16 March 1898.

¹⁸⁴ “A Poll Tax Plan Meeting,” *Times Picayune*, 17 March 1898. Montgomery was also a member of the Agriculture and Immigration Committee at the convention (Democratic Party (La.) State Central Committee, *The Convention of '98*, 35). His speech continued: “This convention, gentlemen, will write its chapter in the history of Caucasian enterprise, and remembering that its triumphs are planted over the dark continent—over teeming millions—shadowed by the might Himalayas, and everywhere circling the world with its glories, let us perform with boldness the duty before us and make the records of Louisiana true to the traditions of that race” (“A Poll Tax Plan Meeting,” *Times Picayune*, 17 March 1898).

¹⁸⁵ “A Poll Tax Plan Meeting,” *Times Picayune*, 17 March 1898. More of his speech: “Mississippi and South Carolina required the poll tax and understanding clause mainly to keep out negroes; not because they were negroes, for the constitution forbids that discrimination, but from the fact that...I believe the understanding

In this regard, Montgomery equated “whiteness” with an inherited civility and suggests that one’s race (essentially conflating whiteness with the concept of Caucasian) provided someone with an instinctual and trustworthy voting instinct. Similarly, another perspective in favor of the poll tax provision suggested that such a tax would help to eliminate the “corrupt negro vote...and thus perpetuate white supremacy.”¹⁸⁶ These opinions also expressed approbation for the suffrage plan because it would “disfranchise very few white men... [and the] Negro [would be] eliminated from politics...Nine-tenths of the Negroes will be disfranchised.”¹⁸⁷ More explicitly, this discourse did not differentiate the foreign-vote from the “white” vote, which presumably subsumed Italians under the category of “white” voters.

However, a second discourse identified a clear difference between native-born and foreign-born rights. This discourse consisted of two main and often entangled positions: one that characterized Italians as racially suspect or “racially transient,” the other that suggested that Italians lacked the proper credentials for citizenship. Both assessments opposed the “Privileged Dago” Clause on the grounds that Italians were a suspect and potentially dangerous voting population.

Despite Thomas Guglielmo’s consideration of Italians as “white on arrival,” as previously mentioned, certain Louisianans challenged the presumed “whiteness” of Italians within the disenfranchisement debates. These opinions suggested that the

of the white man to govern, without an ability to read and write, better entitles him to be a voter than the average negro who can.”

¹⁸⁶ “Louisiana Opinions: What the Newspapers of this Great State Have Said on the Subject of Public Interest and General Importance,” *Daily Picayune*, 21 March 1898.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

amendment was “simply and solely a petty fogging trick intended to permit a lot of illiterates and riffraffs, whose skin happens to be white, to vote, whether they know what a ballot is or not.”¹⁸⁸ Significantly, these opinions dismissed the physicality (and legal) consideration of Italian whiteness and suggested that their racial questionability discounted their skin that “happen[ed] to be white.” This sentiment, like the very act of lynching, collapsed Italians’ race and color. Regardless of Italians’ legal whiteness, these Louisianans conceptualized Italians on par with (or below) the African American population. Opinions in line with this discourse challenged the Italians’ very place within a “white man’s” government: “When we speak of a white man’s government, [Italians] are as black as the blackest Negro in existence.”¹⁸⁹ Similarly, the *Lake Charles Press* criticized the convention for enfranchising “a lot of ignorant Dagoes and shut[ting] out a great many whites.”¹⁹⁰ By this logic, the “Dagoes” existed in opposition to or outside “whiteness.”¹⁹¹

This same discourse went as far as suggesting that the African American population was preferable to the Italians. This perspective criticized the suffrage amendment, because it desired to make “the Dagoes citizens and disfranchise the Negro, and God knows if there is any difference between them it is largely in the

¹⁸⁸ Quoted from the *Monroe News* in the *Daily Picayune*, 15 March 1898.

¹⁸⁹ *Times Democrat*, 22 March 1898.

¹⁹⁰ “Louisiana Opinions, What the Newspapers of this Great State Have Said on Subjects of Public Interest and General Importance,” *Daily Picayune*, 15 March 1898. Lake Charles, along several lakes and river ways, is located in southwestern Louisiana.

¹⁹¹ In other cases, certain opinions conceptualized Italians as white, but marked Italian whiteness as suspect, thus challenging their rights of citizenship. According to the *Homer Guardian-Journal*, “The committee seems to have gone too much upon the idea of admitting all white men and excluding all negroes. In our opinion there are a class of white voters in New Orleans and in some of the southern parishes, who are just as venal, vicious and corrupt as our ignorant negroes, and we think it is just as desirable to eliminate this class of white voters as it is the negro” (“Louisiana Opinions, What the Newspapers of this Great State Have Said on Subjects of Public Interest and General Importance,” *Daily Picayune*, 15 March 1898).

darkies favor, if we may judge the quality now being imported here as plantation laborers.”¹⁹² The *Lake Charles Press* went on to critique the entire premise of the convention: “The whole cry of the convention seems to be ‘eliminate the nigger,’” for our part we would rather eliminate the foreign element, for of the two we are of the opinion that the nigger is the preferable.”¹⁹³ According to these opinions, the foreign vote was considerably more dangerous than the African American vote, which again disregarded the legal whiteness of Italians.

Not only were the Italians racially suspect, but critics of the “Privileged Dago” Clause also campaigned against Section 5 on the premise that Italians lacked the skills and interest in the requirements of citizenship: “The Privileged Dago voter, who can neither read nor write, who has no property and very little interest in this government, and who, in every probability, is grossly ignorant of America and its institutions, is still to be borne as our best of voters.”¹⁹⁴ Accordingly, if the rights of citizenry were finite, offering Italians the right to vote was inherently an “insult” to native-born and a deprivation of their own rights. Just as Italians were potentially too ignorant to exercise the franchise, this perspective worried that offering foreigners the right to vote was a means of rewarding “ignorance” with “privilege and honor.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Quoted from the *Franklin News* in the *Times Democrat*, 22 March 1898.

¹⁹³ Quoted from the *Lake Charles Press* in “Louisiana Opinions, What the Newspapers of this Great State Have Said on Subjects of Public Interest and General Importance,” *Daily Picayune*, 15 March 1898.

¹⁹⁴ “The Suffrage Committee,” *Times Democrat*, 15 March 1898.

¹⁹⁵ “Don’t Adopt the Fifth Section,” *Times Democrat*, 22 March 1898. Such opinions additionally articulated citizenship in gendered terms as they rendered the foreign exemption an “insult to manhood...how can any sensible man say that there is no discrimination against a class, and particularly against our own in favor of the foreign born citizen?” (“Vox Populi,” *Daily Picayune*, 12 March 1898. “Insult to American manhood,” *Times Democrat*, 25 March 1898).

What raged here was a debate between the Ring and the Citizens League. Following a similar pattern as that evident in the debates of 1896, those who criticized the “Privileged Dago” clause appropriated an existing discourse, only sporadically employed in Louisiana before 1896, that racialized Italians in order to embolden the League’s political censure of bossism. These debates concerning the racial questionability of Italians, their inability to properly exercise the rights of the citizenship and the extent to which offering Italians the right to vote was a violation of Louisianan understandings of manhood, racialized Italians in a manner rarely seen in Louisiana previously. Just as a similar racialized discourse was utilized as a means of validating the lynchings of Italians in the 1890s, this discourse that questioned the racial fitness of Italians in 1898 served as a popularly compelling and convincing argument against Italian suffrage. As a result, the racial questionability of Italians persists in the historiography as the veritable motive for disenfranchising Italians, when in fact such racialized language may have simply been used for the purpose of political persuasion.¹⁹⁶ Opposing suffrage in terms of citizenship, xenophobia and racial questionability allowed critics to capitalize on existing prejudices against Italians and to secure popular support for their larger, unaddressed and ostensible objective, the elimination of “bossism.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Scarpaci, *Italian Immigrants in Louisiana’s Sugar Parishes*; Scarpaci, “Walking the Color Line,” Cunningham, “The Italian, a Hindrance to White Solidarity in Louisiana, 1890-1898.

¹⁹⁷ The “Privileged Dago Voter...enjoys the right to vote because he was born abroad, whereas had he been so unfortunate as to have been born under the Stars and Stripes he would be disqualified, lacking the necessary qualifications for the suffrage...gives foreigners electoral privileges and rights not enjoyed by Americans” (“Our Voters,” *Times Democrat*, 6 March 1898).

According to these critics, likely members of the Citizens League, the problem with bossism was the fact that it allowed ward leaders of precincts with a high number of Italian voters the means to secure elections through political maneuvering and pandering—permitting Italians to vote would enable ward bosses to maintain their control of Louisianan electioneering. In this regard, the *Times* marked the “Privileged Dago” Clause as an “outrageous concession to the ward bosses and potential factor of corruption.”¹⁹⁸ Even after the revisions which limited foreign-born access to the franchise to those who had already naturalized, the *Times* questioned: “Why should [the convention] cling to the Privileged Dago, when the people have denounced it as difficult to understand, unless it is due to the subtle but potent influence of the bosses, who have maintained their political strength and carried primaries and elections through the use of these voters.”¹⁹⁹ Similarly, the *Homer Guardian-Journal*, noted, “The corrupt ward bosses of New Orleans are anxious to save the hoodlum voters, but we want to see them go along with the illiterate negroes.”²⁰⁰ The *West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter* further reaffirmed this accusation of bossism:

There are too many Farrells and Fitzpatrick's in that convention for Louisiana's good...John Brewster's 5000 Dagoes and Fitzpatrick's and Farrell's ignorant hoodlums and heelers must be allowed to vote in order to maintain the prestige of the bosses. Their influence is responsible for that unspeakably infamous and damnable section of the bill which accords the right of suffrage to foreign-born illiterates and denies to native illiterates the same privilege.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ “Insult to our Native Citizens,” *Times Democrat*, 6 March 1898.

¹⁹⁹ “The Suffrage Committee,” *Times Democrat*, 15 March 1898.

²⁰⁰ “Louisiana Opinions, What the Newspapers of this Great State Have Said on Subjects of Public Interest and General Importance,” *Daily Picayune*, 15 March 1898.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

The reference about “too many Farrells and Fitzpatricks” is less evidence of anti-Irish sentiment, and more a direct commentary on Fitzpatrick’s control of the urban political machine in New Orleans. Such a direct reproach of Fitzpatrick, the new President of the Choctaw Club, indicates that an additional (and unaddressed) concern of Italian voting was a political one.²⁰² These more direct references reveal the fact that despite the rhetoric of nativism, members of the Citizen’s League (and rivals of the Choctaw Club) condemned Italian voting due to a prevailing concern that the Citizens were politically disadvantaged since bossism controlled the foreign-vote.

There remained a vocal contingent of legislators who supported the right of the foreign-born to vote, most likely members of the Ring or the Choctaw Club.²⁰³ Their support for enfranchising the foreign-born was predicated largely in terms of the rights of naturalized citizens and because the foreign-born, even with the five-year residency requirement, would be unable to qualify under the 1868 provision. These opinions justified the “Dago” exemption based on the fact that the naturalized foreigner had chosen their citizenship, thus making them more invested in the franchise than native-born citizens: “There was no reason to slap in the face those good citizens who had come here and undertaken the burdens of citizenship; they were entitled to all the rights and privileges of citizenship.”²⁰⁴ Similarly, Amos

²⁰² Democratic Party (La.) State Central Committee, *The Convention of '98*, 38. The Choctaw Club was the later iteration of the Ring—more or less the same organization, under a different name.

²⁰³ This assumption is based on the political leanings of the Ring and Choctaw Club, but remains difficult to pin down. First, many newspaper articles went un-authored. Additionally, while the political allegiances of some legislators like John Fitzpatrick (as president of the Choctaw Club) remain clear, others, like Amos Ponder for example, remain less documented.

²⁰⁴ “Vox Populi, Letter to the Editor” *Daily Picayune*, 12 March 1898.

Ponder, a lawyer representing Sabine Parish (a black belt cotton parish in northwest Louisiana) and a “strong Democrat,” defended the exception by explaining, “We are native-born by accident; they are citizens by choice and preference. When a man chooses the proud American flag, he has as much right and privileges as the men who were born under its colors.”²⁰⁵ The *Baton Rouge Truth* accused the critics of foreign-born voting rights of nativism: “Have we returned to the days of knownothing-ism? Does it still inflame the public mind for the Irish, French and German immigrant, who has been five years a naturalized citizen, to be cared for and protected, when every other class of white men are so protected?”²⁰⁶ Within the debates that raged at the convention, R.B. Dawkins, a lawyer from Union (a backland parish with a likely white majority on the northern border of Louisiana), suggested that the Suffrage Committee’s motives for including Section 5 had been misunderstood. “[Dawkins] said he did not know the Dago voter, but in his section the naturalized voters had no equals. They made the best citizens. Of twenty-four foreign voters in his parish all but two would come in under the educational or property qualification.”²⁰⁷ In all likelihood, Dawkins’s support for Section 5 was the result of the fact that he represented a backland parish—since this community would have been comprised of mainly poor (illiterate) whites, his advocacy for the naturalized voter appears in line with constituent group. Even so, according to supporters of Section 5, not only would

²⁰⁵ “The Suffrage,” *Times Democrat*, 11 March 1898. Convention records noted that Ponder was “considered one of the best orators on the floor of the Convention” and that he gave a “speech in favor of the present suffrage law was one of the most eloquent and convincing ones delivered during the session” (Democratic Party (La.) State Central Committee, *The Convention of ’98*, 45).

²⁰⁶ “Louisiana Opinions, What the Newspapers of this Great State Have Said on Subjects of Public Interest and General Importance,” *Daily Picayune*, 15 March 1898.

²⁰⁷ “Poll Tax Plan Gaining Ground,” *Daily Picayune*, 16 March 1898.

the clause enfranchise few, but those few had earned the rights of citizenship through their choice of naturalization.

Beyond those claims favoring the Italians' right to citizenship, many convention-goers and advocates of the "Privileged Dago" Clause additionally recognized the provision as a means of expanding the power of the Democratic Party. Unsurprisingly, the former mayor of New Orleans, active President of the Choctaw Club, and famed ward boss of Orleans, Fitzpartrick explained why the "dagoes" should be protected, "Those people who they termed foreigners had pledged their lives to the Democratic party in assisting it to maintain white supremacy, and many of them had been carried home corpses."²⁰⁸ Fitzpartrick's assessment here remains significant not only because he highlights the participation of Italians in the Civil War and as members of the Democratic Party, but he additionally considers the Italians as a necessary component for maintaining "white supremacy." Similarly, John Dymond of Plaquemines (near Baton Rouge), a larger sugar planter and self-defined "tiller of the soil," explained, "He knew the difficulties of maintaining white supremacy... They needed the '68 voter, the squaw voter, the papoose voter, the naturalized voter and every white man they could get into the electorate."²⁰⁹ Again marking the Italian as "racially transient," these considerations of the Italian as politically useful for securing "white supremacy" reinforce the extent to which at

²⁰⁸ "A Poll Tax Plan Meeting," *Times Democrat*, 17 March 1898.

²⁰⁹ "Suffrage Plan To Be Repaired," *Times Democrat & Daily Picayune*, 12 March 1898. Dymond went on to note that it was unfair to exclude the "half-way citizens," because "they needed them all in all the parties because they made good citizens, and the convention practically had carte blanche to do what they wanted in regard to them." Convention records also noted that Dymond "made a ringing speech in behalf of the dago vote, showing they were as good as native citizens" (Democratic Party (La.) State Central Committee, *The Convention of '98*, 44)

least some Louisianans and certain convention legislators either considered Italians as “white” or were willing to accept Italians within the “white” majority as a means of wresting political control from African Americans. Aligning Italians within the white mainstream offers evidence of the progressive bifurcation of Louisiana’s racial discourse, or rather, the articulation of Louisiana legal categories more readily in terms of racial binaries.

As I have previously demonstrated, supporters of Section 5 were but one of several political factions in Louisiana, and although the *Times* insisted that the entire state was against the proposal, this group remained an active and vocal coalition at the Convention. Who were these advocates of the “Privileged Dago”? Many of these men were planters, those responsible for recruiting Sicilians and other Italians to replace slave labor after emancipation. In his plea for the convention to be fair and just, Mr. Dymond noted his personal role in having recruited many of the foreign-born who currently resided in Louisiana, yet he rationalized,

They nearly all voted the Democratic ticket, and were good citizens. They came from Sicily, which had been the battleground of liberty for thousands of years. The Englishman and the Dutchman and others had at various times been looked down upon, just as the Italians were now looked down upon, in fifteen or twenty years they would prove their good citizenship.²¹⁰

Significantly, Dymond recognized and distinguished the immigrant community in Louisiana as largely Sicilian, rather than identifying the group simply as “Italians.” Secondly, by indicating the cyclicity of nativism, Dymond argued that the Sicilians,

²¹⁰ “[Dymond] said that he was probably more responsible than any one for this vote in Louisiana. He had been among the first to give them employment and they had gone from his employ to different sections of the state, until there were now from 15,000 to 20,000 in the state (“Suffrage Plan To Be Repaired,” *Times Democrat & Daily Picayune*, 12 March 1898).

based on their history as a conquered people fighting for “liberty,” make “good Democrats” and would prove themselves useful citizens.²¹¹ Similarly, Thomas Kernan a lawyer of East Baton Rouge, “one of the most prominent and popular statesmen of Louisiana,” and a “consistent Democrat” spoke eloquently on the matter:

And now they say that we should exclude from the electorate the men whose assistance we invited in the dark days of reconstruction, whom they are pleased to designate by the contemptuous epithet of the privileged Dago voter...Now, who are these men of foreign birth who have cast their lot among us and given in their allegiance to this government? They are not Dagoes, privileged or otherwise. Who are we, I may ask, but foreigners, one of two degrees removed. And, gentlemen of the convention, when I give my consent to do an injustice to a man of foreign birth, I hope I may cease to honor my living Irish father and forget the memory of my dead French-English mother. We called them when we needed them, and they came to our assistance. They must have been faithful allies from '68-'79 or the Democratic majority in the convention of 1879 would have never have granted the extreme courtesy and privilege which they held out to them as an inducement, that they should be permitted to vote upon a mere declaration of intention. And who are these that they call “privileged Dagoes?” Why, gentlemen of the convention, they are the men of civilized Europe. They are the noble Briton, the sturdy German, the chivalrous Spaniard, the gallant Frenchman and the hardy Russian and the genial Irishman. These are they whom the committee has admitted to the franchise, and these are they who have been contemptuously—privileged Dagoes!²¹²

²¹¹ As a sugar planter from Ohio, Dymond appears to support the Democratic ticket, despite the fact that many sugar planters aligned themselves with the Republican party because of their support of sugar subsidies.

²¹² Democratic Party (La.) State Central Committee, *The Convention of '98*, 30. Kernan's quote comes from both the *Daily Picayune* and *Times Democrat*, 16 March 1898. As the speech continues, “Don't you know, and don't they know, that the illiterate Dago voter, who has come here in the last ten years, is excluded by the provision requiring him to have perfected his naturalization prior to the 1st of January, 1898. Don't they know that those men have been voting for years and years upon mere declarations of intentions, without any expectation or desire to become citizens, and that the undesirable vote is cut off by the provisions of the ordinance? Don't they know it? They must know it; and this criticism, though begun in error, can be persisted in only for unworthy purposes... And gentlemen of the convention, I might indulge here in a few words in regard to what is now a defunct feature of the ordinance, by alluding to those who have been contemptuously spoken of as the squaw and papoose voters, however distasteful it may be to speak of such trivial things in such a serious connection. This formed a feature of the alternative property qualification of most of the ordinances introduced into the convention.”

Kernan's speech suggests a number of persuasive claims. First, through his dismissal of the term "Dago," he worked to differentiate the foreigner from the "Dago," which suggests that, at some level by 1898, Louisianans were beginning to understand Italians and Dagoes as fundamentally different types of immigrants. This is in direct contrast with earlier uses of "dago" in the 1880s and early 1890s presented in Chapter 1; by 1898, "dago" was beginning to take on a more pejorative meaning, which required Kernan to distinguish between the "dago" and the Italian. Secondly, Kernan attempted to construct a historical link and political alliance between Italians and the "native-born," whom he works to remind are only "one or two degrees removed" from being foreigners themselves. Finally, by considering Italians as members of "civilized Europe," Kernan endeavored to diminish the racial undesirability of Italians. Likewise, Judge Semmes, a former Confederate senator and well-respected New Orleanian law professor, agreed in a *Daily Picayune* editorial, what was good for the Democratic Party was good for the state.²¹³ Thus, among those who adamantly advocated on behalf of the "Privileged Dago," their argument remained based on expanding the "white electorate." Such an argument that placed Italian immigrants steadily within the confines of "whiteness" served to further collapse Italian race and color and progressively align them (just as they had attempted to construct themselves in the "Dago Parade of 1896") as "white southerners."

²¹³ "I believe in the ascendancy of the white race over the African race; and in view of the conditions which surround us I do not see why we should go out of the way to offend the large number of people in this section who are of foreign birth or descent, while you are seeking to please others in a different section of the State who cannot read and write. Why not please them all?" ("Louisiana Opinions, What the Newspapers of this Great State Have Said on Subjects of Public Interest and General Importance," *Daily Picayune*, 15 March 1898).

The final iteration of Section 5, as ultimately approved by the convention, read as follows:

No male person who was on January 1st, 1867, or at any date prior thereto, entitled to vote under the Constitution or statutes of any State of the United States, wherein he then resided, and no son or grandson of any such person not less than twenty-one years of age at the date of the adoption of this Constitution, and no male person of foreign birth, who was naturalized prior to the first day of January, 1898; shall be denied the right to register and vote in this State by reason of his failure to possess the educational or property qualifications prescribed by this Constitution; provided, he shall have resided in this State for five years next preceding the date at which he shall apply for registration, and shall have registered in accordance with the terms of this article prior to September 1, 1898, and no person shall be entitled to register under this section after said date.²¹⁴

The resulting amendment, which included a residency requirement, a literacy provision and a property requirement (ownership of at least \$300), along with a grandfather clause, accomplished its intended goal. Prospective voters were required to have lived in the state for at least two years (one in the parish and six months in the precinct), which effectively eliminated transient sharecroppers from the voting rolls.²¹⁵ Illiterate whites were “grandfathered” in as a result of the clause that guaranteed the right to vote for all “male persons” regardless of “education or property qualifications,” so long as they could prove they themselves, their father or their grandfather had been eligible to vote before January 1, 1867, the last year before

²¹⁴ “Suffrage Settled,” *Daily Picayune & Times Democrat*, 25 March 1898; Scarpaci, “Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-1910.” If a foreign born citizen did not naturalize before January 1898, they were still eligible to vote based on the literacy and property requirements. Some opinions disparaged the clause since it potentially offered foreigners more access to voting rights than native “whites.” If a native “white” was twenty in 1868, they would be ineligible to vote (unless they were able to prove their voting ancestry), while a newly arrived foreigner, so long as they naturalized before the deadline, was eligible to vote, regardless of literacy and property (“White Foreigners Should Not Have Superior Privileges Over White Natives,” *Daily Picayune*, 7 March 1898).

²¹⁵ Hargrave, *The Louisiana State Constitution*.

military Reconstruction.²¹⁶ Accordingly, from 130,000 in 1897, black voter registration dwindled to only 5,320 in 1900 (less than 5% of its 1897 registrants) and to 1,342 in 1904 (just over 1% of its 1897 registrants). White voter registration also declined, but at a less extreme rate: from 164,000 in 1897 to 125,000 in 1900 to 92,000 in 1904.²¹⁷

Despite the at-times virulently anti-Italian discourse and a certain sentiment that cautioned against trusting “white” foreigners to vote, the Louisiana convention ultimately passed the “Privileged Dago” Clause, along with the grandfather clause and poll tax. While African Americans were effectively disfranchised, Italian voting rights remained protected, which served to reaffirm their status as racially transient and politically utilitarian. This conclusion that affirmed the racial acceptability of Italians was largely the result of post-Reconstruction politics, as Southerners attempted to wrest political control away from Republicans and Populists. Because “Sicilians nearly all voted the Democratic ticket and were good citizens,” their right to vote was ultimately protected over the voting rights of African Americans.²¹⁸ Despite social opinions that problematized the racial position of Italians, Italians remained enfranchised, progressively collapsing their race and color, in the name of “home rule.”

²¹⁶ R. Volney Riser, *Defying Disfranchisement: Black Voting Rights Activism in the Jim Crow South, 1890-1908* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 78. The voting bill, in its entirety, established a literacy and property requirement. However, if a voter could prove that their father or grandfather registered before Reconstruction, they were exempt from these requirements and still entitled to vote (*Daily Picayune*, 15 March 1898).

²¹⁷ Hargrave, *The Louisiana State Constitution*, 15.

²¹⁸ “Suffrage Plan to be Repaired,” *Daily Picayune*, 12 March 1898.

Ultimately, these disenfranchisement debates, despite the convention's conclusions, reveal the fact that Italians in Louisiana were available pawns within local politicking. Those who contested the "Privileged Dago" Clause articulated their opposition in terms of rightful citizenship, loyalty, xenophobia and racial questionability, in order to garner support for their additional political goals: the elimination of bossism, the defeat of the Regulars and the maintenance of labor control. Yet, Italians retained their right to vote in Louisiana not necessarily because of their racial acceptability but because of their efficacy in serving the New Orleans political machine. With the triumph of the Regulars over the Reformers, the Regulars recognized the utility of, and thus felt compelled to protect, the Italian voting bloc.

In the midst of this, Italians themselves made calculated choices; rather than aligning themselves in these debates alongside African Americans, Italians strategically attempted to align themselves on the side the disenfranchisers, as native, white "southerners." Not only did this divide opposition and facilitate the steady disfranchisement of African Americans, but this also contributed to the progressive categorization of statewide discourse more explicitly in terms of "black" and "white," rather than the more fluid structure that historically characterized Louisiana. Additionally, because Sicilians and other Italians organized as "Italian voters," this worked to steadily erase their regional differences transported from Italy. In this sense, Louisiana's disenfranchisement debates served as a moment of identity reconfiguration: Sicilians and other Italians as "Italians," Italians as "white

southerners,” the disenfranchiseable as “black,” and the Regulars, including the Ring and the Choctaw Club, as the redeemers of “home rule” in Louisiana.

Chapter 4
**“We ain’t got no desks for Dagoes!”:
Segregating Italians, Sicilians and Schools in Turn-of-the-Century
Mississippi**

“A race question with unusual features has developed in this community, and it is feared that there will be serious consequences.”² The “ugly manifestation of race prejudice” that had developed in October of 1907 in Sumrall, Mississippi involved twenty-five Italian children and was “attributed to ill feeling over the school question.”³ The local community, incensed by the “presence” of a group of suspect children in the “white” school, began taking measures to expel the Italian students. In an effort to protest the expulsion, a group of Italian laborers, led by a Sicilian shoemaker named Frank Scaglioni, took their objections to the state authorities (and the Italian Consulate in New Orleans), where the Superintendent of Education ultimately ruled in favor of the Sicilian children’s right to attend the “white” schools in Sumrall. However, in response to his efforts in “forcing the Italian children into the public school,” the local community responded with intense verbal and physical abuse and Scaglioni was brutally and publically whipped.⁴ Events subsequently calmed but only after the majority of Italians in Sumrall permanently fled the area.

This chapter, using 1907 Sumrall, Mississippi as its case study, investigates the attempt to segregate Sicilian and other Italian children from native-born white schools in the Gulf South. What was at the root of the local community’s effort to

¹ Rhoda Coleman Ellison, “Little Italy in Rural Alabama,” *Alabama Heritage*, no. 2 (Fall 1986): 34–47.

² “Italians in a Public School Cause a Row at Sumrall, Miss.,” *Daily Picayune*, 1 October 1907.

³ *Times Democrat* quoted in “The South Wants Italians,” *The Outlook*, November 16, 1907.

⁴ The press alternatively recorded his name as Scagleone, Scageleoni and Scigaleoni.

expel these Italian children? What conclusions can be drawn about the rhetoric used against (as well as to persuade in favor of) Italian and native-born, white integration? What should be made of the intense violence that confronted Scaglioni's efforts? In light of the previous chapters, what does this moment reveal about the racial placement of Italians and Sicilians in the Jim Crow Gulf South? And finally, was this segregation effort racially motivated or perhaps religiously encouraged and economically grounded?

Rather than a part of a larger effort to remove Sicilians and other Italians from "white" schools, this moment in Sumrall, Mississippi appears to be an isolated instance. Although unable to definitively conclude that this was the only attempt to segregate Sicilian and other Italian schoolchildren, there is evidence to support the fact that Italian children did attend public schools elsewhere in the South without issue.⁵ Thus, in part because of its exceptionality, this moment demonstrates several significant conclusions about the experience of Sicilians and other Italians in the Jim Crow Gulf South. First, with regards to the racial placement of Italians/Sicilians in the South, this event reveals that Sicilians and other Italians occupied a racially transient position. I continue to emphasize the inherent mobility within this concept of transiency, which was less in-between or interstitial (a theory I will subsequently address in this chapter), as Italian/Sicilian racial identity was read and interpreted at the convenience of the viewer. Second, this event provides further evidence for the fact that anti-Italian prejudice in the Gulf South was utilitarian. By accessing an

⁵ "Gov. Vardaman Denies the Story," *Biloxi Daily Herald*, 31 December 1907 (Biloxi, MS); "Were Undesirable," *The Greenville Times*, 5 January 1908.

existing anti-Italian rhetoric that justified separation in racial (and even religious) terms, the native-born white community justified their efforts to exclude the Sicilian children from the local school. A symptom of larger issues and less about an actual desire to segregate Italians from the white school, this effort at exclusion was, to a certain degree, economically motivated; these twenty-five children were caught up in a bias and prejudice meant to economically pressure their parents into labor conformity. In this regard, the conflict in Sumrall exposes the socioeconomic motivation behind anti-Italian prejudice and the existing class conflict within southern industry and agriculture. While (native-born white) employers encouraged and advocated in favor of Italian/Sicilian immigrants and their labor, poor, working-class whites remained more directly in conflict with this influx of cheap, immigrant labor. As a result, native-born working-class whites felt economically threatened, which fueled the campaign against Sicilian and other Italian children and factored into the ensuing violence in Sumrall, Mississippi. Finally, these moments of crisis, like the 1898 disenfranchisement efforts in Louisiana and the campaign against Italian schoolchildren in 1907 Mississippi, reveal the efforts of Sicilians and other Italians to prescribe their own identity and to position themselves as white within the racial landscape of the Jim Crow Gulf South.

Before delving into the specifics of Sumrall, Mississippi, I begin with an overview of the status of school segregation laws at the turn-of-the-century in the Gulf South. The Supreme Court of Louisiana actually provides tremendous insight

into the legal statutes regarding segregation throughout the nation in their in-depth analysis within *State vs Treadaway*.⁶ In 1910, Octave Treadaway was indicted for violating Louisiana's miscegenation statute; initially, Treadaway was acquitted on the grounds that he was an "octoroon" and had, therefore, not in fact violated the state's statute.⁷ As a result, the Supreme Court of Louisiana undertook a painstaking evaluation of whether or not an "octoroon" was in fact a "negro," whereby they provided an overview of the language used in segregation laws around the country, including those laws concerning school segregation. By and large, they found, southern states used the term "colored" or "colored races" in their explanation of laws regarding who should be separated from "whites" within public schools.⁸ The outlier Tennessee used the categories of "negroes, mulattoes, or persons of mixed blood" on the subject of schools.⁹ Significantly, several states, such as Florida, Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi, although they used the term "colored" on the subject of schools, they employed the terms "negro and mulatto" regarding their marriage laws.¹⁰ What was the difference between those who were subsumed under the category of "negro or mulatto" and "colored"? Furthermore, could certain immigrant groups be deemed "colored" under Mississippi law?

⁶ *State v Treadaway*, No. 18,149, 126 La. 300; 52 So. 500 (Supreme Court of Louisiana 1910). I return to and expand on my analysis of this case in my subsequent chapter on miscegenation laws.

⁷ Treadaway had been indicted and acquitted of violating the aforementioned Act No. 87 of 1908.

⁸ This includes the following states: Louisiana, Maryland, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama and Kentucky.

⁹ *State v Treadaway* (Supreme Court of Louisiana, 1910).

¹⁰ If Mississippi's Constitution of 1890 used "colored" on the subject of schools, why did they include an alternative racial category on the subject of marriage? Several factors may account for this discursive variance. Perhaps, because miscegenation was seen as a more subversive and enigmatic act, a more precise racial category was chosen for the marriage statute. Alternatively, the ambiguity of using "colored" in their school segregation statute may have resulted from the fact that schools were considered a more public and visible venue, which could have been more easily (than marriage) regulated through public perception.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court of Louisiana's evaluation of school segregation cases in the *Treadaway* ruling additionally included both the precedents set in *Clark v. Board of School Directors* (Iowa, 1868) and *Pierce v. School Trustees* (New Jersey, 1883).¹¹ In *Clark*, the question before Iowa's court was whether the school board could maintain different schools for whites and "colored" when the state's Constitution made "no distinction" between "the white and the colored youths" within the state. Iowa's court fell short of identifying "negro" as synonymous with "colored," although they did explain, "If the school board could exclude African children from schools, they could exclude Irish, French, German, English, etc."¹² This demonstrated to the Louisiana justices that "colored" was a racial designation that was considered "a synonym for African" and associated with "negro."¹³ In this regard, such a rhetorical precedent would have marked Italian and Sicilian children outside the category of "colored."

In *Pierce*, the case revolved around a "mulatto" child who had been excluded from a "white" school in New Jersey, even though the state's "statute forbade the exclusion of a child from any school on 'account of his or her religion, nationality or color.'"¹⁴ The court in New Jersey continued:

Counsel further urges that since, under the rule of the trustees, an Italian (for example) as dark as the relator's children would have been admitted, the exclusion was therefore owing, not to 'color,' but to race, which the statute does not prohibit. But I think the term 'color,' as applied to persons in this country, has had too distinct a history to

¹¹ For more on the *Pierce v. School Trustees* case, see New Jersey Supreme Court, *New Jersey Law Reports* (Soney & Sage, 1885).

¹² *State v Treadaway* (Supreme Court of Louisiana, 1910).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

leave possible such an interpretation of the law. Both in the statute and in the regulations of the respondents persons of color are persons of the negro race.

Again, the court appears to confirm that a “person of color” was synonymously a “person of the negro race.” However, this case additionally demonstrates that New Jersey’s court was also reading color and race as legally distinct categories—while the state forbade exclusions on the grounds of “color,” exclusions based on “race” were permissible. Considering the above example, an Italian could not be excluded from a public school because of their physically darker skin color, but, could they be excluded based on their race?¹⁵ Additionally, what of the regional particularities of Mississippi?

Before 1870, there was no public education system in Mississippi. A proposal at Mississippi’s 1868 Reconstruction-era Constitutional Convention suggested that the state institute a compulsory attendance policy along with a statewide public and integrated school system.¹⁶ Although the proposal did not pass, black delegates did manage to defeat a contrasting initiative that would have required segregated schools

¹⁵ In *Van Camp v. Board of Education of Logan*, the question before the court was “whether children of five-eighths white and three-eighths African blood, who are distinctly colored and generally treated and regarded as colored children by the community where they reside, are of right entitled to admission in white schools” (*Van Camp v. Board of Education of Logan*, 9 Ohio St. 412, cited in *State v Treadaway* (Supreme Court of Louisiana, 1910)). The court concluded, “They are in the ordinary, if they are not in the legal, sense, white. The demurrer admits that they are, in fact, if not in law, 'colored' children. Our standard philologist, Webster, defines 'colored people' to be 'black people,' 'Africans, or their descendants, mixed or unmixed.' Such is the common understanding of the term. A person who has any perceptible admixture of African blood is generally called a 'colored' person” (Ibid.). Similarly, in *State v Treadaway*, which I discuss at length in Chapter 5, the court concluded, “These decisions are authority that a negro is necessarily a person of color; but not that a person of color is necessarily a negro. There are no negroes who are not persons of color; but there are persons of color who are not negroes” (*State v Treadaway* (Supreme Court of Louisiana, 1910)).

¹⁶ Charles C Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All: The Battle over School Integration in Mississippi, 1870-1980* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 7.

in the state. Ultimately, the 1868 convention concluded by ordering the state to develop a statewide education system but stopped sort of finalizing the details: Mississippi would create a “system of ‘free’ public schools which ‘all children between the ages of 5 and 21 shall have equal advantages.’”¹⁷

Under the first legislature of the new government in 1870, Mississippi lawmakers determined that twenty-five parents in any county could establish a school and receive public funding; local communities would then determine the details. Black legislators refrained from advocating in favor of mixed schools, since they worried that the alternative would be to deny the establishment of black schools entirely. Briefly, two integrated schools opened in Jefferson County (along the Mississippi/Louisiana border and Mississippi River in the southwest part of the state), while “all other local residents in the state chose to establish schools under the new law for one race only.”¹⁸ Between 1870-75, both white and black schools suffered from a lack of funding. Meanwhile, the Ku Klux Klan violently persecuted black schools and their teachers throughout the state. While blacks in the Mississippi Delta region managed to retain more control over their schools, black schools were less able to thrive in central and northeastern Mississippi.

By 1875, Democrats had reclaimed control over the state and imposed a new state constitution that disenfranchised the state’s African American population by imposing a literacy requirement for voting, along with complicating the guidelines for

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 8.

residency and voter registration.¹⁹ In their effort to reform what they saw as the state's defunct educational system, Democratic legislators quickly impeached the black Republican state superintendent of education. The new Democratic superintendent railed against the state's public school system, which he called "an unmitigated outrage upon the rights and liberties of the white people of the state. It was enacted to demoralize our people and to proselyte our children in the interest of a political party hostile to the dignity, interests and sensibilities of the white people of Mississippi."²⁰

As a result, by 1878, the state legislature had rewritten state education law in order to codify segregation within Mississippi public schools. The new law read, "The schools in each county shall be so arranged as to offer ample free school facilities to all educable youths in that county but white and colored children shall not be taught in the same school-house, but in separate school-houses."²¹ In order to further mandate racial segregation, the new law imposed geographic parameters requiring black and white schools to be established at least two and a half miles apart and additionally gave the county superintendent the sole power to certify teachers.²² While the state's teacher association had initially been integrated, by 1889, the Mississippi State Teachers' Association barred black teachers from membership.²³ The state went on to revise their 1868 constitution into the iteration that still remains in place today; thus, the Mississippi Constitution of 1890 formalized a constitutional

¹⁹ Frank Cavaioli, "Andrew Houston Longino," *Italian Americana* 11, no. 2 (1993): 171.

²⁰ Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All*, 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 11. As a result, the Mississippi Association of Teachers of Colored Schools was established in 1906.

mandate for a segregated public education system: “Separate schools shall be maintained for children of the white and colored races.”²⁴ Following suit and conforming to this mandate, a new 1892 education law was passed that required “separate schools shall be maintained for children of the white and colored races,” the implementation of segregated school districts and required that a “dual school system” be established and maintained.²⁵

Throughout the 1890s, black and white schools in Mississippi were in fact on equal footing, “equally underfunded [and] equally inadequate.”²⁶ However, with the federal sanction of the 1899 Supreme Court case *Cumming v Richmond County Board of Education*, which gave states control over determining the parameters of “separate but equal education,” the divide between Mississippi’s black and white schools quickly expanded.²⁷ Over the next three decades, as white schools in Mississippi modernized, consolidated, and secured increased funding, black schools received little to no state support or funding. For example, in Bolivar County in 1935, with 6,216 white school-age children and 35,708 black school-age children, the district spent \$283,161 on white schools in contrast to only \$38,765 on the black schools.²⁸ In part, this change was brought about by a new provision adopted by direct vote in the Mississippi Constitution in November 1900 which established a “a county common school fund, which shall consist of the poll tax to be retained in the counties where

²⁴ James W Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 67.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁶ Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All*, 15.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁸ Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese*, 66.

the same is collected.”²⁹ This meant that school funding became directly tied to the amount of poll tax collected in a particular county, which made school funding increasingly locally apportioned.

The charge to defund black schools in Mississippi was led in no small part by Mississippi Governor James Vardaman (1904-1908), known as the “Great White Chief” due to his platform and espousal of white supremacy. This was, after all, the same governor who told the Mississippi legislature in 1906 that he wanted to stop funding black schools because this was “money taken from the toiling white men and women of Mississippi—and devoted to the vain purpose of trying to make something of the negro which the Great Architect of the Universe failed to provide for in the original plan of creation.”³⁰ Black education, he continued, would result in “rapes and murders, which precipitated the unpleasantries of hangings and burnings...[and] ultimately undermined one of the primary reasons for preserving racial segregation: to prevent social equality and miscegenation.”³¹ Of note and a figure to whom I will subsequently return, Vardaman was the governor of Mississippi when the Sumrall incident took place.

Mississippi remains a distinctive site to investigate the treatment of Italians, since, just preceding the Sumrall incident, Andrew Houston Longino had served as governor of the state from 1900 to 1904.³² Significantly, Longino was Italian and

²⁹ J.L. Power, “The Political, Educational and Social Status of the Negro in Mississippi,” *Macon Beacon*, 16 February 1901.

³⁰ Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All*, 15.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Anselm McLaurin, Mississippi’s governor from 1896-1900, was the last (former) Confederate soldier to lead the state. With McLaurin’s endorsement, Longino was elected to govern the state, trouncing his

remains (at least through 2007) only one of twenty-five American governors with Italian ancestry and the only Italian American elected governor to a southern state.³³ Longino was a Mississippian native, having attended public school, college and law school in the state; an active Democrat, he served in the state senate from 1880 to 1884 and served as a delegate to the Democratic presidential convention and chaired the Mississippi delegation in 1900. His ancestors had arrived in Virginia from northern Italy in 1752. Historian Frank Cavaoli notes that Longino's significance lies in the fact that he was accepted within "a regional culture not noted for ethnic pluralism."³⁴

Within a climate that only a few years later would attempt to segregate Italian schoolchildren from a white school, it seems uncharacteristic that Mississippians would elect an Italian as governor. In part, Longino's election resulted from his moderate political views, which at least in 1900, prevailed over an openly racist position. His position as a prominent member of the state's dominant political party, along with the endorsement of the sitting governor, designated even his more progressive anti-lynching stance as unthreatening. Significantly, one of his campaign promises included enhancing existing state laws to prevent lynching, since he felt that "violence weakened respect for law and order and discouraged capital investment in the state."³⁵ Longino actually proposed legislation that would have made the county in which a lynching took place financially responsible for supporting the families of a

Populist rival, 42,273 to 6,097 votes (Cavaoli, "Andrew Houston Longino," 173). Frank J. Cavaoli, "Italian-American Governors," *Italian Americana* 25, no. 2 (2007): 133-59.

³³ *Ibid.*, 170.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

lynched person. The legislature, however, rejected his proposal and lynching numbers remained steady over the course of his gubernatorial tenure.³⁶

Additionally, Longino's election resulted from the fact that he did not actually represent himself as Italian nor was he seen as an ethnic figure.³⁷ First, Longino defied expected stereotypes of Italians, who were associated with crime and were seen as unable to assimilate: "Their language and their behavior patterns of wine-drinking, exclusiveness, music, dancing and independence also caused much difficulty."³⁸ Second, Longino was of the Baptist faith, thus, unlike Catholicism, his religion was not in conflict with Southern Protestantism. Third, Longino's ancestors were northern Italians, which, in line with racial taxonomies of the time period, would have rendered him superior to southern Italians and Sicilians (who made up the majority of the Italian immigrants in the South). Lastly, Longino benefited from well-established roots in the South; not only was he American-born, but his ancestors had settled in the South several generations earlier. While Cavaoli argues that, "Longino had assimilated into southern white Anglo-Saxon Protestant society," it was less that he had assimilated and more the fact that he had established himself, by birthright, as a native-born white Mississippian.³⁹

³⁶ Ibid. Cavaoli considers Longino's anti-lynching stand rather progressive for the time period and suggests that it "may have resulted from his being an Italian American in the South at a time when Italian Americans were being lynched" (Ibid., 177). However, given Longino's background and identity, we cannot assume his solidarity with the newly arrived immigrant or Sicilian population.

³⁷ Cavaoli notes that there was no ethnic voting base in Mississippi and that "Italians were unwilling or unable to assimilate" (Ibid., 176).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 177. Cavaoli suggests that Longino was an exception to voting patterns in the South, while I argue, since Longino was so well established, that his election remains consistent with Mississippi voting habits.

Longino displayed various attitudes consistent with other native-born whites, most clearly seen in his views on public school funding and his opinion that free school funds should not be distributed differently to the two races. According to his reasoning, he explained that the effect “would be contrary to that broad and deep philanthropic spirit that has always moved the great common heart of Christian man and womanhood in Mississippi to a love of justice and fair play toward the needy, whoever and wherever they are.”⁴⁰ Longino went on to remind readers,

It must be borne in mind that the negro is our neighbor and is here to stay; that he is the dependence largely of the white people for labor; that it is also in a great measure due to that labor that in the past the South’s cotton, sugar and rice industries have brought the section’s greatest wealth, and given in a commercial importance in every land and country where the nation’s flag protects the American shipping...Besides, he is of our citizenship, and being of a weaker race, becomes a ward of the white people of the State, and they should not violate the trust by taking from him the benign influences of education, which help to make him a better man, a better citizen and a better Christian.⁴¹

Not only does Longino represent himself alongside his white constituents through his use of “our,” but the paternalism of his statement makes clear that he subscribes to a rather traditional view of the southern racial order. His emphasis on civilizing the “weaker race” marks his viewpoints well in line with his fellow white Mississippians. Further proclaiming Longino’s views as consistent with statewide sentiment, as a *Macon Beacon* editorial proclaimed, “There is not a State in the Union more liberal, more just or more kind to the negro than Mississippi; and it will continue; and there is

⁴⁰ Governor Longino, quoted in J.L. Power, “The Political, Educational and Social Status of the Negro in Mississippi,” *Macon Beacon*, 16 February 1901. (Macon, MS)

⁴¹ Ibid.

not a race or class of people under the sun more contented, more happy or more prosperous than the negro population of this State.”⁴²

Motivated by both impulses, Vardaman’s white supremacy and Longino’s paternalism, Mississippi public schools were segregated between the “white and colored races” by the turn-of-the-century. Within the implementation of a binary educational system, to which category were “in-between” groups assigned in Mississippi? For further insight into this phenomenon, consider the particularities of other “in-between” groups in the South, such as the extensive literature written about the Chinese community in Mississippi or the Delta Chinese. According to the original and foundational monograph on the subject by James Loewen, about 1,200 Chinese had settled in the Mississippi Delta by 1870. “White Mississippi considered [these Chinese] to be roughly Negro status and barred them from white schools, organizations, and other social interaction.”⁴³ Because the Chinese were “neither white nor black,” Mississippi actually (despite the legal statute) developed a “triple segregated school system” with different buildings for Chinese, whites and blacks. Within the Mississippi racial structure, Loewen interprets the placement of the Chinese as a “third race”: “Negroes do not consider them exactly white; Caucasians do not consider them black. They are privileged and burdened with an ambiguous racial identity.”⁴⁴ Loewen goes on to qualify this statement by explaining that the

⁴² J.L. Power, “The Political, Educational and Social Status of the Negro in Mississippi,” *Macon Beacon*, 16 February 1901. (Macon, MS) Power adds, “Socially, the Mississippi negro feels very comfortable. He has his own schools, his own churches, his own hotels and boarding houses, his own traveling apartments, with ‘none to molest or make him afraid.’ He doesn’t want to mix, and custom and the law sustain him” (Ibid.).

⁴³ Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese*, 2.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Chinese were perceived as having a “near-Negro” position—“neither whites nor blacks quite thought of them *as* Negroes.”⁴⁵ Ultimately, Loewen explains, the Chinese operated as a sort of “middleman” between the white and black communities in their roles as interpreters, creditors and bondsperson. As part of this “middleman” position, the Chinese-run grocery stores thus became a staple and the “only integrated milieu” in the Mississippi Delta.⁴⁶ In terms of their racial categorization, Loewen contends that though the Chinese were “originally classed with blacks,” by 1971, the Chinese in Mississippi were “viewed as essentially ‘white.’”⁴⁷ Loewen argues that it was not simply economic success that allowed the Chinese access to social mobility; he explains that the Chinese used their economic success to nurture an image for themselves that differentiated them from the black majority.⁴⁸

Historians have since begun to question and complicate Loewen’s conclusions that the Chinese were read as a “third race.” Recasting Loewen’s claim, Moon-Ho Jung explains that coolies did challenge the dualism of the South as the racialization of coolies served to redefine both whiteness and blackness. Because of their ambiguity, coolies confused boundaries and served to reconstruct racial and national

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 60; emphasis his. Loewen also notes that intermarriage between the Chinese and white or black Mississippians was significant in its rarity (*Ibid.*, 63).

⁴⁶ Jigna Desai and Khyati Y Joshi, “Introduction: Discrepancies in Dixie: Asian Americans and the South,” in *Asian Americans in Dixie Race and Migration in the South*, ed. Jigna Desai and Khyati Y Joshi (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 61. This is on par with the number of Italian-run groceries in the Delta region and the preponderance of Italian-held colored saloon licenses in rural Louisiana (Vincenza Scarpaci, “Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-1910,” in *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America*, ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York: Routledge, 2003), 70).

⁴⁷ Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese*, 2.

⁴⁸ Loewen explains, the Chinese “utilized ministers, wholesalers, and other Caucasians to whom they had close ties in order to persuade the local white power structure to admit them to schools, hospitals, and other white public institutions” (*Ibid.*, 5).

boundaries.⁴⁹ In an effort to push back against the reading of southern history solely in terms of black/white relations, Jigna Desai and Khyati Y. Joshi (in their recent compilation entitled *Asian Americans in Dixie*) ponder a similar question as that which informs this dissertation: How and where were Asian Americans racially located within the “hegemony of the Black and White binary” during segregation?⁵⁰ Desai and Joshi consider the significance of the Asian American narrative in the South, like that of the Italians in the South, as demographic (not numerical); this means that while the Chinese were not a proportionally large population, the impact of this small community offers meaningful insight into how race operated in the South.⁵¹ More so than just “recovery and recuperation” of a lesser known narrative, the inclusion of the experience of numerically small “in-between” groups within the southern historiography becomes an effort to revise the narrative of the South as a transnational space (rather than a provincial space of isolationism), along with a reconsideration of the relational-nature of racial formation.⁵² As Desai and Joshi point out, “Coolies were located significantly between Black and White, between slavery and freedom—and were perhaps critical to the perceived line between them.”⁵³ In addition to the mutually constitutive nature of these racial histories, Desai and Joshi

⁴⁹ Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 5. In terms of the label of “coolie,” Jung explains that “coolies” were never technically a legal category. While coolies were presumed to be “Asians coerced into migrating to and working in the Caribbean,” Jung considers them a “conglomeration of racial imaginings that emerged worldwide in the era of slave emancipation, a product of the imaginers rather than the imagined” (Ibid.).

⁵⁰ Desai and Joshi, “Introduction: Discrepancies in Dixie: Asian Americans and the South,” 3-13.

⁵¹ According to the U.S. Census, only 257 Chinese were recorded as residing in Mississippi by 1910.

⁵² Desai and Joshi, “Introduction: Discrepancies in Dixie: Asian Americans and the South,” 6. Desai and Joshi also consider the inclusion of this narrative as a reconsideration of “discourse of race, slavery, empire, citizenship and the nation-state in broad terms” (3).

⁵³ Ibid., 8.

also conclude that anti-Chinese sentiment in the South was largely ground in religious terms as Coolies remained “unwilling to adopt their employers’ religious viewpoints.”⁵⁴

Leslie Bow in her work on “Racial Interstitiality and the Anxieties of the ‘Partly Colored’” posits a similar underlying question: “How did Jim Crow accommodate a supposed ‘third’ race, those individuals and communities who did not fit into a cultural and legal system predicated on the binary distinction between colored and white? Put another way, where did the Asian sit on the segregated bus?”⁵⁵ Bow points out that Jim Crow laws made no provisions for the “partly colored” or the “almost white”—there were no gradations or in-between spaces within the binary caste system of segregation law.⁵⁶ In this regard, Bow interrogates Loewen’s reading of the Chinese as having achieved whiteness in Mississippi over the course of a single generation. Instead, Bow suggests that, unlike the Irish, Italians and Jews, the Chinese “failed” to achieve white identification. She defines those who failed as those who

remain within the gap between white identification and black disavowal, who may have taken on the prejudices of the elite without ever gaining entry into their society, that is, those who remain... ‘partly colored.’ In contrast to such European groups, the Asian’s supposed

⁵⁴ Ibid., 9. As Desai and Joshi continue, “While anti-immigration fervor targeted European and Asian migrants, religious and racial ideologies about the Oriental and Mongol races more strongly fortified anti-Asian immigration sentiment in the post-Civil War era” (Ibid.).

⁵⁵ Leslie Bow, “Racial Interstitiality and the Anxieties of the ‘Partly Colored’: Representations of Asians under Jim Crow,” in *Asian Americans in Dixie Race and Migration in the South*, ed. Jigna Desai and Khyati Y Joshi (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 55.

⁵⁶ Ibid. As Bow deliberates, “What does it mean to claim ‘near whiteness’ for a population formerly known as ‘colored’? What becomes erased in its construction, and to what extent do those occlusions disrupt the naturalized teleology of racial advancement that governs American race talk?” (Ibid., 56).

caste rise can be characterized only as partial, as a registered incompleteness, a 'near whiteness.'⁵⁷

Bow suggests "racial interstitiality" as a theoretical and conceptual device for interpreting and understanding comparative race relations.⁵⁸ What does she mean by "racial interstitiality"? Bow suggests that rather than focusing on the in-between or varying degrees of whiteness, interstitiality "emphasizes the tri-part, comparative nature of U.S. race relations."⁵⁹

Along a longer temporal trajectory, Bow's change over time assessment remains persuasive. However, how does interstitiality answer Bow's very question of where the Chinese sat on the segregated bus, or, more particularly relevant to this chapter, where they went to school? While beyond the temporal focus of this chapter, the much discussed U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Gong Lum v Rice* (1927) provides further insight into the influencing considerations regarding school segregation and "in-between" populations in the Gulf South. In 1924 Rosedale, Mississippi, Gong Lum's Chinese daughter was excluded from attending the local white school. Lum's lawyer challenged the exclusion on the grounds that Martha Lum was "not a member of the colored race nor is she of mixed blood, but that she is pure Chinese...[Furthermore,] there is no school maintained in the District for the education of children of Chinese descent."⁶⁰ While the Mississippi Circuit Court ruled in favor of Lum, the Mississippi Supreme Court reversed the decision based on the

⁵⁷ Ibid., 59. "If one could say that the Irish, Italians, or Jews represent the 'success' of white identification as it translated into both state and cultural recognition *and* affective though invisibly normative identity, what of those who failed?" (Ibid.)

⁵⁸ Ibid., 71.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Bow also take care to emphasize the South as a "microcosm of the national" (Ibid., 71).

⁶⁰ Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese*, 67.

fact that since Chinese were “not white...they must fall under the heading ‘colored races.’”⁶¹ Upon appeal, the U.S. Supreme Court, citing the separate but equal clause in *Plessy v Ferguson*, agreed with the state of Mississippi and granted that Mississippi’s policy was intended to “preserve the white schools for members of the Caucasian race.”⁶² Chief Justice Taft explained, “A child of Chinese blood, born in, and a citizen of, the United States, is not denied the equal protection of the laws by being classed by the State among the colored races who are assigned to public school separate from those provided for the whites, when equal facilities for education are afforded to both classes.”⁶³ As a result of this ruling, Martha Lum’s was excluded from the white (and arguably only) school in the area; accordingly, most Chinese living in Mississippi in the early twentieth-century received little or no education, since those who did either illegally attended white schools or attended “Negro” schools.⁶⁴ While theoretically the Chinese may have existed within a “tri-part” racial structure, neither white nor necessarily “Negro,” as Bow admits, because segregation did not make space for gradations, the Chinese in the South were relegated to the legal status of non-white.

In terms of how Bow’s assessment of the Chinese as being “partly colored” or “near whiteness” compares to the Italian experience, the Chinese may not have been able to achieve white identification in the same way that Italians eventually were.

⁶¹ Ibid., 68.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ “The vast majority of Delta white school systems were closed to the Chinese until well into the 1940s. In Rosedale...a separate school for Chinese operated for a time in 1933, and the Chinese were not admitted to the white public schools until about 1950” (Ibid.).

However, within the context of the turn-of-the-century Jim Crow Gulf South, Bow's concept of "racial interstitiality" appears more or less as another synonym for "in-betweenness," whereby the concept of "racial transiency" proposed in this dissertation underscores the mobility of Italian racialization. Assuming that her choice in language here was intentional, Bow's terminology, then, highlights a different historical process, one in which Chinese were caught "in-between" whiteness and blackness; alternatively, the concept of transiency emphasizes the Italian movement back and forth between racial categorization. Finally, as this chapter demonstrates, a significant difference between the Chinese and Italian experience was the ultimate racial relegation of these two groups.⁶⁵ Bow notes that because Jim Crow segregation was officially codified without grey area, Chinese in the South were ultimately categorized as non-white, whereas groups like Italians eventually gained access to white identification. Again, without countering the general premise of this claim, I maintain that Italian racialization was contextually contingent, meaning that in certain moments Italians were identified as white, whereas in other instances their racial and color status were contested. In the case of which schools they were assigned, except for the focal event of this chapter in Sumrall, Mississippi, it appears that Italians were allowed to attend white schools,

⁶⁵ Although the two groups were racially categorized in different manners and to different ends, the religious experiences of the Chinese in the South aptly compares with that of Italians. Outside of New Orleans, Catholic Italians would have similarly practiced a religion that differed from their employers. As Desai and Joshi note, coolies who maintained their religious practices were understood by employers as "unwilling" to adapt; likewise, in the rural sugar parishes, the Catholicism of Italian laborers was often read as a sign of their unassimilability.

although, this still does not mean that their status as white was not contested in other moments.⁶⁶

Beyond the history and historiography on the segregation of Chinese in Mississippi, what of other “in-between” groups in the South—to which side of the color line were they assigned? In an effort to problematize the rigidity of the color line, Vivek Bald offers insight into the unique experience of Bengali peddlers who settled in the Treme neighborhood of New Orleans between the 1890s and 1920s. Like Italians, Bengali peddlers initially arrived as temporary immigrants, as “sojourner laborers;” unlike Italians, because of subsequent federal legislation passed in 1917 and the Supreme Court ruling of *United States vs Bhagat Singh Thind* in 1923, Indians were eventually not allowed to immigrate, vote, own land or naturalize as U.S. citizens.⁶⁷ Yet, in New Orleans, even as skin pigmentation determined one’s health conditions and access to housing and public facilities, the experience of Bengali peddlers in New Orleans was marked by a certain mobility as they “gained temporary passage through areas that were otherwise off-limits to men of color.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ While Thomas Guglielmo mentions the attempted segregation of Sicilian children in Mississippi, he notes how the treatment of Chinese schoolchildren differed, since a “triply segregated school system” developed to account for Chinese schoolchildren; yet, he concludes, “Nothing in Italians’ experience in the Deep South ever approached this sort of treatment” (“No Color Barrier: Italians, Race, and Power in the United States,” in *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America*, ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York: Routledge, 2003), 40).

⁶⁷ Vivek Bald, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 2.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 52. Perhaps such flexibility or apparent straddling of the color line would appear unsurprising given the heterogeneity of New Orleans, but as Bald argues, by the turn-of-the-century, Jim Crow laws were steadily working to flatten New Orleans into “a rigid, two-tiered structure that drew a single, unyielding line between white and nonwhite” (*Ibid.*, 57). Bald continues, “A broadly heterogeneous New Orleans was divided by both the laws and practices of Jim Crow into unequal ‘White’ and ‘Negro’ worlds” (*Ibid.*, 88).

In addition to their physical mobility, the Bengali peddler enjoyed a certain amount of racial mobility as well.⁶⁹ Through their participation in the commodification of the exotic Orient, such performance and dress allowed these peddlers to “move” within a segregated city, just as their exotic appearance protected them for racial prejudice.⁷⁰ Bald demonstrates that those initially temporary sojourners who remained in New Orleans continued to confound expectation; instead of “forming ethnic enclaves,” Bald argues that these Bengali peddlers primarily married local women of color (usually longstanding members of the Creole of Color community) and eventually became “part of the larger history of Black New Orleans.”⁷¹ Recognizing the shared patterns across “sojourning networks” at the turn-of-the-century, Bald also makes a pointed comparison between the Bengali peddler and the southern Italian by noting that both were aided by the domestic, reproductive and factory labor of women; such domestic and financial contributions provided the stability that enabled these migrants to eventually successfully open small businesses.⁷² An apt comparison given their mutually shared racial mobility and transiency, the experience of the Bengali peddler and southern Italian sojourner differed with regards to their eventual racial categorization. While the Italian was eventually subsumed within the white mainstream, Bald concludes that despite

⁶⁹ As Bald explains, this privilege of movement or transiency resulted from their performed and commercialized exoticism; the Bengali peddler “shuttle[ed] back and forth between an Indianness they performed for their customers and a blackness they shared with New Orleans’ and other cities’ populations of African descent” (Ibid., 52).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Vivek Bald, “Selling the East in the American South: Bengali Muslim Peddlers in New Orleans and Beyond, 1880-1920,” in *Asian Americans in Dixie Race and Migration in the South*, ed. Jigna Desai and Khyati Y Joshi (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 47.

⁷² Bald, *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America*, 75.

possessing certain privileges of movement, the transiency of these Bengali peddlers was largely temporary as they were ultimately absorbed into New Orleans's black community. Even so, and although Bald does not readily address the issue of school segregation, the Bengali peddler in New Orleans, like the Chinese in Mississippi, confounded easy categorization within Jim Crow segregation law.

While the Italians in the Gulf South shared certain similarities with the Chinese in Mississippi and the Bengali peddlers in New Orleans, their experience was marked by certain particularities. According to the 1910 census, nine million people resided in Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi, while only 31,259 were Italian-born (two-thirds of those resided in Louisiana).⁷³ In 1900, only 845 Italian-born immigrants lived in Mississippi, a population that had more than doubled by 1910; even so, Italians only made up 2.3% of the white population in the Mississippi Delta region.⁷⁴ Although numerically insignificant (comparatively-speaking), like the Chinese in Mississippi and the Bengali peddlers of New Orleans, the Sicilians and other Italians in Mississippi still represented a population that defied easy racial categorization within a binary legal structure. Within this racial landscape, where did the “in-between” Italians and Sicilians reside, and more specifically, where did they attend school?

The segregation or attempted segregation of Italians and Sicilians from “white” schools in the South does not appear to have been a widespread phenomenon.

⁷³ Cavaoli, “Andrew Houston Longino,” 175.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 176.

Jerre Magione and Ben Morreale claim in *La Storia* that a Louisiana law forbade Italian children from attending “white schools.” However, they provide no specific citation for the law and I have yet to see this claim corroborated within either the primary or secondary sources. “We ain’t got no desks for Dagoes!” was allegedly shouted by a schoolgirl in Blocton, Alabama in 1929; while this provides color of the local sentiment, this moment does not reveal evidence of a legal precedent nor protracted effort to remove “dagoes” from the local schools.⁷⁵ Ultimately, the only noteworthy case of the (attempted) segregation of Italians/Sicilians from “white” schools appears to be the incident in Sumrall, Mississippi (upon which this chapter began), an incident that has received very minimal scholarly treatment.⁷⁶

The original historiographical reference to Sumrall seems to be from a 1951 article by Rowland T. Berthoff entitled “Southern Attitudes toward Immigration,

⁷⁵ Ellison, “Little Italy in Rural Alabama.”

⁷⁶ In terms of Magione and Morreale’s claim that a law in fact existed that prohibited Italian children from attending white schools, there are several possible explanations for this reference (*La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 211-13). Magione and Morreale could have been referring to a law that existed on the books but which no effort was made to enforce, since I have found no evidence to suggest that Italian/Sicilian children were ever removed from “white” schools. They could have also interpreted a sort of self-segregation as imposed segregation, since Italian children in Louisiana often attended Catholic schools run by Italian nuns, but by choice, not by law (“Bishop Blenk’s Stay Comes to a Close; Distinguished Louisiana Prelate Leaving this Morning,” *Daily Picayune*, 27 May 1902). Finally, theirs is a broad (geographically and temporally) overview of the Italian American experience over five centuries. In the same paragraph where they make mention of this Louisiana segregation law, they explain that Italians were lynched in Tallulah in 1899 because they were “unaware of racial prejudice” and had “aroused the resentment of the local white community by their friendly attitude toward blacks” (Magione and Morreale, *La Storia*, 212). As my chapter on lynching reveals, the causes of this lynching were much more complicated, but without a closer reading of the historical particularities of that moment, those causes may be overlooked; in their efforts to cover five centuries of Italian American history, their mention of the Louisiana law may have been an oversight or confusion with the debate that ensued in Mississippi. Ultimately, not only have I found specific references to the fact that Italian children did in fact attend public schools in New Orleans, but the absence of any other reference to this particular Louisiana law in the secondary literature marks the existence of the law as questionable (“Gov. Vardaman Denies the Story,” *Biloxi Daily Herald*, 31 December 1907 (Biloxi, MS); “Were Undesirable,” *The Greenville Times*, 5 January 1908 (Washington County, MS)).

See also Thomas Guglielmo, “No Color Barrier: Italians, Race, and Power in the United States,” in *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America*, ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York: Routledge, 2003), 40.

1865-1914.”⁷⁷ As Berthoff relates, “Natives of Sumrall, Mississippi, a lumber town, objected to Italian children attending the local school. In 1907 when a mob beat the Italians’ spokesman, a crippled shoemaker, many of the immigrants fled.”⁷⁸

Berthoff’s singular mention of the events in Sumrall serves simply as evidence for his article’s larger claim: despite the fact that immigrants had initially been recruited as laborers to the South, by the turn-of-the-century, immigrants suffered severe hostility throughout the South. Yet, Berthoff concludes his essay without a sustained analysis or explanation of the *why* behind this observed change.

Beyond Berthoff, Thomas Guglielmo is the only other scholar to make reference to the segregation efforts in Sumrall. In both “No Color Barrier” and *White on Arrival*, Guglielmo explains that a “Mississippi Delta town attempted to bar Italians from white schools.”⁷⁹ Like Berthoff, Guglielmo’s mention of the incident serves to qualify his overall argument that Italians were “white on arrival.” Even while acknowledging that the color status of Italians may have been contested and that “color questioning” of Italians may have been especially severe in the South, Guglielmo concludes, as evidenced by the numerically few incidents involving Italians and school segregation, that Italians were never subjected to Jim Crow-like segregation statutes.⁸⁰ Yet, without a sustained treatment of the events in Sumrall, Mississippi, this does not allow for a complete understanding of why a group of

⁷⁷ Rowland T. Berthoff, “Southern Attitudes Toward Immigration, 1865-1914,” *The Journal of Southern History* 17, no. 3 (August 1, 1951).

⁷⁸ Berthoff, “Southern Attitudes Toward Immigration, 1865-1914,” 344. For his description of the Sumrall incident, Berthoff cited from the New York magazine *The Outlook*.

⁷⁹ Thomas A Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 27; Guglielmo, “No Color Barrier: Italians, Race, and Power in the United States,” 36.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Italian/Sicilian children were subjected to this apparently uncharacteristic treatment in 1907. The significance here resides in its very atypicality—if segregating Italian children from “white” schools was a rare, even singular, event, what transpired in 1907 Sumrall to force the issue? Furthermore, what does this incident (or lack of other similar incidents) reveal about the larger patterns and racial placement of Italians and Sicilians in the Gulf South?

Sumrall, Mississippi (1907)

Sumrall, Mississippi, eighty miles from Gulfport and Biloxi on the coast, in the midst of the state’s pine belt, developed as a lumber town and was named after a Union soldier. Daniel Sumrall moved to the area in the late 1880s, purchased a mill, built a cotton gin and opened a post office in 1890.⁸¹ After the J. J. Newman Lumber Company set up operations in neighboring Hattiesburg in 1894, they purchased Sumrall’s mill and gin and opened a large sawmill.⁸² Thus, throughout the first quarter of the new century, timber and lumber quickly became the main industry and employer in the region. J. J. Newman began building their own rail line for transporting lumber in 1897, and by 1902, the Pearl and Leaf River Railroad, using migrant labor with “picks and shovels to hack their way through the woods,” had connected Sumrall with Hattiesburg.⁸³ Incorporated in 1903 with a population of 525, Sumrall soon expanded to a bustling town of 3,000 as workers flocked to the area for

⁸¹ Bob Pittman, *Lamar County: The Land and the People* (Jackson, MS: Pittman Enterprises LLC, 2004), 85.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid. “Newman (J. J.) Lumber Company Records,” 12/16/2004. Finding aid at the University of Southern Mississippi Libraries Special Collections, Hattiesburg, MS.

<http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/archives/m286.htm>

jobs at the mill; such a relocation would have a momentous impact on ensuing racial relations. In 1904, the first church in Sumrall opened its doors, West Sumrall Baptist Church, soon followed by a second Baptist Church, a Methodist Church and, very significantly, a Catholic Church.⁸⁴ According to the hyperbolic local oral history, “In the early years, Sumrall’s school was among the largest and best in the world.”⁸⁵ In a town built with migrant labor, with enough non-Protestant residents to warrant the opening of a Catholic Church and located in a state which had unequivocally mandated their schools be racially segregated, how would race play out in Sumrall schools?

In October 1907, the Newman Lumber Company employed ten Italian families in Sumrall, Mississippi, with twenty-five Italian children of school age among them.⁸⁶ However, when the Italian children applied for admission at the local school, the parents of the non-Italian children “objected to the presence of the Italian children in the school, and demanded that they be excluded.”⁸⁷ The focus of the debate centered on two Italian children in particular, Joseph and Josephine Frier (the children of Charlie Frier), who, according to reports, “insisted on attending the public

⁸⁴ Ibid., 87. By 1910, the population of Lamar County was 11,741, wherein the entire population was classed as rural since no town in the county had a population greater than 2,500 (Edgar Malcolm Jones, H. G. Lewis and United States Bureau of Agriculture, *Soil Survey of Lamar County, Mississippi* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922). In terms of the racial breakdown of Lamar County, African Americans made up 25-37.5% of the county’s population (U.S. Census, 1910). Unfortunately, the “foreign-born white” population was not calculated at the county-level, therefore it remains difficult to quantify how many Italians resided in Lamar County at the time of the Sumrall incident. However, according to the 1910 Census, 9,389 “foreign-born whites” resided in the state of Mississippi, roughly evenly split between urban and rural; 22.8% of the foreign-born population was from Italy.

⁸⁵ Pittman, *Lamar County: The Land and the People*, 87. For example, in 1921, of the school’s 950 students, 70% went on to attend college.

⁸⁶ “Italians in a Public School Cause a Row at Sumrall, Miss.,” *Daily Picayune*, 1 October 1907. Of note, the rhetoric in the title of this article alone is demonstrably anti-Italian, which offers insight into the initial public perception of the events in Sumrall.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

white schools.”⁸⁸ Because of the intense resentment of the “natives,” when the Italian children arrived on the first day of school, Principal Mr. T. M. Harbert suspended the Frier children “pending a decision” from the State Superintendent of Education J.N. Powers.⁸⁹ Powers forwarded the issues to the State Attorney General R.V. Fletcher who, “while he sympathized with the people in that community, and did not think it advisable for the Italian children to attend the same school with “white” children, the law was plain and there was no way to exclude them from the benefits of public education.”⁹⁰ According to the Attorney General, the only legal solution available to the community was the “establishment of a separate school for the Italians.”⁹¹ In this regard, Fletcher “expressed personal regret that the law made no exceptions as to ‘race, color or previous condition of servitude,’ and that the Italian children must be permitted to attend the schools unless separate and equally good school facilities were otherwise provided them.”⁹² At this point, tensions were so heightened, as *The Columbus Dispatch* reported, the “usually quiet place [of Sumrall] was now in the throes of a racial revolution that may shake the entire State of Mississippi.”⁹³

⁸⁸ “Another Race Trouble: Report from the *Hattiesburg Daily News*,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, 10 October 1907. *The Columbus Dispatch* was a Democrat newspaper published in the manufacturing center of Columbus, Lowndes County in east-central Mississippi (Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*).

⁸⁹ “Italians in a Public School Cause a Row at Sumrall, Miss.,” *Daily Picayune*, 1 October 1907; “Another Race Trouble: Report from the *Hattiesburg Daily News*,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, 10 October 1907 (Columbus, MS).

⁹⁰ “Italians in a Public School Cause a Row at Sumrall, Miss.,” *Daily Picayune*, 1 October 1907.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² “Another Race Trouble: Report from the *Hattiesburg Daily News*,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, 10 October 1907 (Columbus, MS).

⁹³ *Ibid.* The *Dispatch* went on to explain that the “race issue” in Sumrall was similar to “the recent disturbance on the Pacific coast.” The “recent disturbance” to which *The Columbus Dispatch* refers was the Pacific Coast riots in 1907, where a rescinded school board order instructing Japanese and Korean students to attend the city’s “Oriental School” led to an anti-Japanese riot in San Francisco and where violence against South Asians in Bellingham, WA escalated and 125 South Asians were driven from the city because they were believed to be taking “white” jobs and driving down wages (Erika Lee, “Hemispheric Orientalism

Several aspects of this narrative warrant a careful consideration. First, despite the fact that Sumrall was a rather new settlement built largely on migrant labor, through their effort here in self-defining themselves as “native,” the “white” community in Sumrall was clearly making an effort to identify the Italian families in question as visiting interlopers, as outsiders. Second, it remains striking that the dispute between the “white” community in Sumrall and a group of Italians was referred to within the press as “racial,” indicating that the Italians were perceived as falling outside the category of whiteness. Additionally, the fact that the Attorney General of Mississippi agreed that Italian children should not attend the same school as “white” children could be indicative of several things. Perhaps, as a politician, he was pandering to the prejudices of his Sumrall constituents, or, he was exhibiting a statewide awareness that Italians represented a problematic population whose children would somehow negatively taint the sanctity of the white school. Arguably a combination of both, this provides insight into the existing anti-Italian rhetoric available in Mississippi. Yet, Fletcher additionally warned the local school trustees that if they denied Italian children the “privileges of attending white schools,” they risked interference on behalf of the federal government and Italian ambassador.⁹⁴

Indicating a lack of local interest in the story, reports on the Sumrall incident within the local and regional presses were limited. The New York’s *The Outlook* was

and the 1907 Pacific Coast Race Riots,” *Amerasia Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2007): 19-48). Collectively, these events represent the same troubles in Sumrall, MS, both the scholastic and labor issues.

⁹⁴ “Remarkable Race Prejudice,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, 17 October 1907. (Columbus, MS)

one of the few presses to weigh in on the subject.⁹⁵ In their examination, *The Outlook* cautioned the actions of the Sumrall community:

By excluding the children of these immigrants from the limited social equality and privileges of the schools, Mississippians will not only retard the desired assimilation of a class of laborers they and the South in general need so badly, but they will also by that act contribute another cause for National embarrassment and international ill feeling.⁹⁶

While acknowledging the immigrant children as “alien,” *The Outlook*, invoked a rather scolding tone and warned that preventing the children from accessing local public education would exacerbate their ability to assimilate. The press also made note that immigrant labor was desperately needed in the South and also cautioned those citizens in Sumrall against inciting a diplomatic crisis on par with the post-lynching indemnity crises.

The underlying question remained, if not in the “white,” school, where were the Italian students in Sumrall to be consigned? In places with larger Italian communities, like New Orleans, Italian children did readily attend school, often Catholic schools, without issue. Native-born and Italian immigrant communities alike were well aware of education as a tool of Americanization and a mechanism of cultural and national identity. As the *Daily Picayune* reported in 1902, Bishop Blenk, visiting New Orleans from Italy, while still encouraging Italian children in New Orleans to learn Italian, the “maternal tongue of the language of immortal Dante,”

⁹⁵ *The Outlook* was a weekly magazine based out of New York. Originally begun with as a Baptist paper with a religious and moral emphasis, the magazine shifted in 1893 to a “general family general” with a focus on sociological and political issues. Circulation in the early 1900s was more than 100,000 (Hazel Dicken Garcia, *Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-Century America* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 253). I turn to *The Outlook* since it was one of the few sources to report on the Sumrall incident.

⁹⁶ “The South Wants Italians,” *The Outlook*, 16 November 1907.

explained how the Sisters at the school were “true civilizers” with a “holy and refining influence.”⁹⁷ The Bishop note, “See how [these sisters] are trying to inculcate the principles of good citizenship and lofty lives among those who are to take their places as citizens of this great and glorious country, where liberty reigns.” Because of their exposure in the school, the Bishop predicted that these Italians would grow into “good, law-abiding American citizens who will be an honor to their own and their adopted country.”⁹⁸ *The Outlook* concurred with the *Daily Picayune*’s assessment by noting that “common schools” were the best way to assimilate “alien people.”⁹⁹ In this regard, public discourse regarded schools as sites for constructing and instructing in the performance of citizenship.

Given the lack of rhetoric on par with Governor Vardaman’s anti-black education claims (recall, he claimed that black education would lead to “rapes and murders”), it remains unlikely that the impulse of the “native” community was ground in an ideological effort to prevent Italian children from securing an education.¹⁰⁰ The problem was not Italian-education, per se, but the alleged site of that education. Here lies an essential crux of the situation: the Attorney General’s solution was the “establishment of a separate school for Italians.”¹⁰¹ Although he did not think it “advisable for the Italian children to attend the same school with “white” children,” the Attorney General did not suggest that the Italian children should attend

⁹⁷ “Bishop Blenk’s Stay Comes to a Close; Distinguished Louisiana Prelate Leaving this Morning,” *Daily Picayune*, 27 May 1902.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ “The South Wants Italians,” *The Outlook*, 16 November 1907.

¹⁰⁰ Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All*, 15.

¹⁰¹ “Italians in a Public School Cause a Row at Sumrall, Miss.,” *Daily Picayune*, 1 October 1907.

the region's black school.¹⁰² While seemingly marking the Italians in Sumrall, Mississippi as "in-between," this is not meant to suggest that Italians were regarded as a third-race. This does, however, demonstrate that Italians, unlike the Chinese in Mississippi, were not regarded as "other" enough to be dispatched into the "colored" or black community.

Finally, this moment demonstrates a key effort on the part of the Italian community in Sumrall to construct their own racial identity. A separate Italian school for their community was not what they wanted; they wanted their children to attend the "white" school, and they were willing to fight for that right. Loath to go quietly, the Italian community took their segregation challenge to the State Superintendent of Education and remained unwilling to accept the offer of an Italian-only school. This demonstrates Italians making the effort to prescribe their own racial identity, rather than allowing the larger community to impose an identity upon them. This school debate thus reveals the determination of the Italian community in Sumrall,

¹⁰² Ibid. The school records for "colored" schools in Lamar County are sparse. According to the WPA History of Lamar, County, the county boasted nine schools for African Americans in the 1930s, including Sumrall High School for Negroes. While the date of Sumrall High School's founding remains undocumented, nearby county schools, Half Moon and Foxtown, would have been available for African American students between 1906-08 when the Sumrall incident occurred (Works Progress Administration, "WPA History of Lamar, County, Mississippi." From Pamela J. Gibbs, *Lamar County, Mississippi Genealogy and History*, 2007. <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/chicago.html> (accessed 25 February 2017)). Furthermore, the neighboring city of Hattiesburg (eighteen miles away), reportedly built a school for "negroes" on Sixth Street as early as 1896. According to a placard produced by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, the Eureka School opened in 1921 and was "one of the first modern brick schools in Mississippi for blacks;" given its geographic location, it appears that the Eureka School was built on or near the location of the original sixth street school. Additionally, even before the completion of the Eureka School, according to oral histories of the area, African Americans in Hattiesburg could have also attended the school at the Mount Zion Baptist Church (Ed Walters, "Historical Sketch of Eureka-Royal Street-Rowan School," *Euro Souvenir Booklet*. (EUROHA: Hattiesburg, MS, 1999); "Oral History with Mrs. Mattie Lou Hardy" by Sadie Bailey. From University of Southern Mississippi. Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, 24 October 1995, <http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/spcol/coh/cohardym.html> (accessed 25 February 2017); Benjamin Morris, *Hattiesburg, Mississippi: A History of the Hub City*. (The History Press: Charleston, SC, 2014).

Mississippi to position themselves as *white*, alongside the white community and attending the white school, a fight that would quickly devolve into violence.¹⁰³

The “racial revolution” feared by the local press did in fact manifest itself physically, in the form of an attack on a local Sicilian by the name of Frank Scaglioni. Because Scaglioni had been “too active in his leadership” and had been “perniciously active in trying to force the children into the school,” citizens of Sumrall “took him beyond the town limits and gave him a sound whipping and warned him to desist.”¹⁰⁴ However, according to the subsequent investigation undertaken by Count Moroni of the Italian Consulate in New Orleans, “the affair was even more outrageous than first reported.”¹⁰⁵ “Not only was Scaglioni whipped but other outrages were perpetrated upon him, the details of which are not fit to print.”¹⁰⁶ Only *The Outlook* offered any particulars of the incidence:

The victim of the mob said he was called to his door by a man who stated he had a message for him sent from New Orleans. He had just stepped outside of this door when he was seized and heavy ropes thrown around his neck. He was threatened with death, so he declares, and was dragged for almost a mile into the woods, where he was badly beaten with the end of a thick log-rope and other weapons in the hands of his captors.¹⁰⁷

The local press stopped short of printing the exact details of what befell Scaglioni, as

¹⁰³ Reminiscent of the Italians who marched in protest of the 1898 disenfranchisement efforts in Louisiana, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the Italian community in both these instances worked to establish themselves as members of the white mainstream.

¹⁰⁴ “Objected to the Italians,” *Macon Beacon*, 5 October 1907 (Macon, MS); “Italians Removed to Hattiesburg,” *Daily States*, 5 October 1907; “Italians in a Public School Cause a Row at Sumrall, Miss.,” *Daily Picayune*, 1 October 1907; “Whipped Italian for Pernicious Activity,” *Daily States*, 1 October 1907.

¹⁰⁵ “Details Aren’t Fit to Print,” *Daily States*, 3 October 1907.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, spelling standardized from Scageleoni (in the original) to Scaglioni.

¹⁰⁷ “Italians in the South,” *The Outlook*, 16 November 1907. According to the *The Outlook*, no other northern newspaper or magazine condemned the mob’s conduct at Sumrall (“The South Wants Italians,” *The Outlook*, 16 November 1907).

the *Daily Picayune* confirmed, the treatment of Scaglioni was more “severe” than originally reported and partook “somewhat of the nature of Indian brutality.”¹⁰⁸ The *Times Democrat* confirmed these reports, describing Scaglioni as “crippled” and the acts that occurred as “barbaraoies [sic]...No appeal to race prejudice can justify the atrocity committed at Sumrall and the reputable citizenship of Mississippi will doubtless be prompt to condemn the disgraceful outbreak of savagery.”¹⁰⁹ It remains noteworthy that the treatment of Scaglioni was so ruthless that multiple newspapers invoked turn-of-the-century anti-indigenous rhetoric and described his treatment as “Indian brutality” and “savage,” so vicious and brutal that newspapers could not even relate the very details. Within the historical era of yellow journalism and salacious reporting, this unwillingness to print the details suggests that Scaglioni’s treatment was exceptionally cruel.

In terms of who was responsible for the violence, details remain limited.¹¹⁰ *The Columbus Dispatch* described the responsible parties as “a few cool heads,” while the *Daily States* hypothesized that based on the “character of the outrages” that “the mob was composed of people of the lower class.”¹¹¹ What exactly had Scaglioni done that would precipitate such a fierce reprisal? Was this really about Italian

¹⁰⁸ “Italians at Sumrall. Result of Investigation Sent to Ambassador at Washington,” *Daily Picayune*, 4 October 1907.

¹⁰⁹ “Labor Troubles in Mississippi: Special Report from *Times Democrat*,” *Macon Beacon*, 5 October 1907 (Macon, MS). As the *Macon Beacon* elaborated, “Crippled Italian was severely aeaten [sic] by a mob and subjected to other barbaraoies [sic] of an unprintable nature, is attributed to ill-feeling between the races over the school question.” The *Daily Picayune* mentioned a “graphic story of the whipping and unspeakably brutal treatment of the Italian laborer, Frank Scaglioni” (“Italians are Aroused,” *Daily Picayune*, 6 October 1907; spelling standardized from Scageleoni (in the original) to Scaglioni).

¹¹⁰ Beyond the articles cited here, reports on the beating remain limited, as none of the sources consulted specifically mention who was responsible for the violence.

¹¹¹ “Another Race Trouble,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, 10 October 1907 (Columbus, MS); “Details Aren’t Fit to Print,” *Daily States*, 3 October 1907.

children attending a white school? More than an effort at squashing Scaglioni as a community leader, as I will soon elaborate, the source of this ferocious response comprised additional motives.

The local community reportedly feared a violent retribution for the attack on Scaglioni, as the sheriff was dispatched to investigate and “swear in a posse to preserve the peace.”¹¹² Manager Majors of the Newman Lumber Company allegedly declared that “they must be protected from violence.” However, the “they” to whom he referred was the local “native” community who were in need of protection from Italians attempting to “wreak their vengeance.”¹¹³ Majors declared that “if it is necessary to swear in a hundred men it ought to be done.”¹¹⁴ In a clear revelation of the Newman Lumber Company’s allegiances, all but two of the Italian families were removed to nearby Hattiesburg in the days following the attack.¹¹⁵ Of particular interest, the mill transferred fifteen “negro laborers” to Sumrall to replace the Italians, arguably evidence that black workers represented a more controllable form of labor than Italians.¹¹⁶

As a result of the violence in Sumrall, a New York journalist wondered, “Can it be possible that Mississippians hold that Italians, like the negro, are of a different race from our own, or do they place different nationality on the same plan with

¹¹² “Italians in a Public School Cause a Row at Sumrall, Miss.,” *Daily Picayune*, 1 October 1907.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ “Italians Removed to Hattiesburg,” *Daily States*, 5 October 1907. Significantly, press reports warned that the actions in removing the Italians families to Hattiesburg could have international ramifications, on par with the post-lynching indemnity crises: “The driving out of the Italians at Sumrall by the residents is liable to bring up international questions, as Italy has no use for Mississippi any way” (*Greenville Times*, 6 October 1907). (Washington County, MS)

¹¹⁶ “Quiet At Sumrall. Nearly All of the Italians Transferred to Hattiesburg. Negroes Sent to Sumrall to work the Newman Lumber Company’s Mill,” *Daily Picayune*, 3 October 1907.

different race?”¹¹⁷ What little historiographical evaluation scholars have undertaken regarding Sumrall appears to answer this question in the affirmative, that Italians were perceived in Mississippi as a different race. And, this would be an easy conclusion to make. After all, the press talked about the dispute as a “race question” and as an “ugly manifestation of race prejudice.”¹¹⁸ Italian children were to be removed from the “white” school and isolated in an Italian-only school, on par with Jim Crow segregation laws. For his efforts in attempting to protest this segregation effort, Scaglioni was publically whipped. Without a more comprehensive reading of the events of Sumrall, or without consulting the sources beyond the initial disturbance, a similar conclusion might easily be reached.

Yet, upon further reading and despite the original claims to the contrary, contemporary press reporting soon suggested that the motive behind the incident was not in fact a “serious scholastic question.”¹¹⁹ Instead, as the press contended in the days following the upheaval (but which has gone unexamined in the existing historiography), Scaglioni’s whipping may have been triggered by the school issue but the beating was more provoked by a question of labor: “It now develops that the whipping was not the result of an attempt to place Italian children in the public schools at all, but that it was the result of fear that the Italians employed in Sumrall would accept the ten per cent cut in wages which it is claimed has been ordered in

¹¹⁷ “The South Wants Italians,” *The Outlook*, 16 November 1907.

¹¹⁸ “Italians in a Public School Cause a Row at Sumrall, Miss.,” *Daily Picayune*, 1 October 1907; *Times Democrat* quoted in “The South Wants Italians.”

¹¹⁹ “Remarkable Race Prejudice,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, 17 October 1907. (Columbus, MS)

many of the lumber plants of the South.”¹²⁰ Thus, because of a question of “labor wages” as well as a fear that the Italians would consent to a reduced wage, “which other white laborers would not accept,” this was an aggravating factor in the attempt to exclude the Italian children from the local school in Sumrall and in ultimately forcing their removal to Hattiesburg.¹²¹ The *Macon Beacon* went on to hypothesize that “underlying the entire trouble is the evident desire of the labor malcontents among the unskilled whites to drive both the Italian and the negro laborers from the sawmill field.”¹²² Undeniably, the evidence here is circumstantial, as these were journalistic assertions regarding the motives behind the school “trouble.” However, the claims remain persuasive considering that multiple news sources made the same assertion that the school incident was incited by a labor conflict.¹²³

Additionally, the theory put forth in the *Daily States*, that the violent whipping of Scaglioni was not actually concerned with schools but instead about wages, was allegedly suggested by Count Gerolamo Moroni, the Vice-Consul at the New Orleans consulate. During the process of his investigation, Moroni commented, “This fear [that the Italians would accept a lower wage] and nothing else was the cause of the ill-

¹²⁰ “Details Aren’t Fit to Print,” *Daily States*, 3 October 1907. *The Outlook* confirmed, “The underlying the entire trouble is the evidence desire of the labor malcontents among the unskilled whites to drive both the Italian and the negro laborers from the sawmill field” (“The South Wants Italians,” *The Outlook*, 16 November 1907).

¹²¹ “Italians at Sumrall. Result of Investigation Sent to Ambassador at Washington,” *Daily Picayune*, 4 October 1907.

¹²² “Labor Troubles in Mississippi: Special Report from *Times Democrat*,” *Macon Beacon*, 5 October 1907. (Macon, MS)

¹²³ “Details Aren’t Fit to Print,” *Daily States*, 3 October 1907; “Italians at Sumrall. Result of Investigation Sent to Ambassador at Washington,” *Daily Picayune*, 4 October 1907; “Labor Troubles in Mississippi: Special Report from *Times Democrat*,” *Macon Beacon*, 5 October 1907 (Macon, MS); “The South Wants Italians,” *The Outlook*, 16 November 1907.

treatment which Scaglioni received.”¹²⁴ It remains possible that, like the incidences of lynching, this was a case of the Italian state trying to generate a common enemy, but, given the context, Moroni’s theory remains entirely plausible. According to the *Macon Beacon*, the wage scale of the sawmills of southern Mississippi had been readjusted, which had led to a temporary depression in the yellow pine lumber industry.¹²⁵ Accordingly, this depression had “led to an ugly manifestation of race prejudice.”¹²⁶ This premise, that the violence resulted from concerns over labor and wages, remains in accordance with patterns of labor unrest of the time period.

Especially given the economic depression of 1907, other incidents reinforce the notion that white workers were resentful of other non-white workers.¹²⁷ For example, this pattern of labor unrest was replicated in the events that transpired in December of that same year in a neighboring lumber town of Chathamville, Louisiana. According to the *Daily Picayune*, at least two Italians were killed in a “lumber riot.”¹²⁸ Shreveport’s *The Caucasian* noted that, “local residents resented” the fact that the Tremont Lumber Company had imported Italian workers, therefore a “mob organized and the newcomers fired on.”¹²⁹ The *St. Landry Clarion* described the violence as “labor troubles between natives and Italian laborers” where a mob

¹²⁴ “Details Aren’t Fit to Print,” *Daily States*, 3 October 1907; spelling standardized from Scageleoni (in the original) to Scaglioni.

¹²⁵ “Special from the *Times Democrat*: Labor Troubles in Mississippi,” *Macon Beacon*, 5 October 1907. (Macon, MS)

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 265. As Woodward explains, labor riots and violent labor conflicts exhibited a similar pattern, whether in the North, West or South, in times of economic depression (*Ibid.*).

¹²⁸ “Guide to the News,” *Daily Picayune*, 17 December 1907.

¹²⁹ “Importation is Costly,” *The Caucasian* (Shreveport, LA), 17 December 1907. See also, “Around the State,” *The Donaldsonville Chief* (Donaldsonville, LA), 21 December 1907.

“attacked an Italian camp.”¹³⁰ It remains unclear if the Tremont Lumber Company brought in the Italian workers as strikebreakers, but the “native” laborers certainly felt threatened and displaced by the Italian laborers, which led to their armed attack.¹³¹ Thus, Chathamville further suggests that labor unrest was an inciting factor in the Sumrall incident.

The labor allegation is further substantiated by the fact that sentiment regarding the presence of Italian laborers was entirely mixed within the region, as this incident reveals the class conflict among those who were in favor of Italian labor (the employers) and those who were opposed (workers in competition for jobs/wages). As Colonel F. L. Maxwell of North Louisiana explained, he was “entirely satisfied with Italian labor, which he has worked now for several years.”¹³² Maxwell claimed that Italian labor “gives him 33.3% better satisfaction than any other kind.”¹³³ In evaluating the specific events that transpired in Sumrall, the *Times Democrat* noted that Italians had been encouraged to settle in Mississippi when labor was scarce “and it was absolutely necessary to supplement the native labor with additions from the outside.”¹³⁴ As the *Times Democrat* went on to argue, the attacks against the Italians in Sumrall were entirely unjustified since they had not been imported as strike breakers “nor to hammer down the price of wages.”¹³⁵ Furthermore, in contrast with

¹³⁰ “News from All Over the State,” *St. Landry Clarion* (Opelousas, LA), 21 December 1907

¹³¹ *Daily Picayune*, 16-17 December 1907, cited in Clive Webb, “The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886-1910,” in *Lynching Reconsidered: New Perspectives in the Study of Mob Violence*, ed. William D. Carrigan (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008), 175–204.

¹³² “Likes Italian Labor,” *Daily States*, 4 October 1907.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ “Labor Troubles in Mississippi: Special Report from *Times Democrat*,” *Macon Beacon*, 5 October 1907. (Macon, MS)

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

assumptions regarding Italian criminality, assumptions that the *Times Democrat* themselves had propagated a decade and a half prior, the Italians in Sumrall had “aroused no race feeling by the commission of any crimes, for it is conceded that they have conducted themselves as peaceable and law abiding citizens... The conduct of the Italians has not been such as to invite or to justify barbarous reprisals, and it does not appear that any valid plea can be offered in extenuation of the outrage at Sumrall.”¹³⁶ Especially in contrast with rhetoric espoused by the *Times Democrat* in the 1890s, the *Times Democrat* by 1907 wrote in defense of Italian laborers: “It is clearly the duty of the Mississippi authorities to run down the monsters who partitipated [sic] in the outrage and to punish them with the severity which their crime demands.”¹³⁷ Significantly, the “monsters” here were the “native” whites who the *Times Democrat* felt had unjustifiably persecuted the Italian laborers and run them out of town. Times had apparently changed; despite justification of mob action in 1891 New Orleans, the *Times Democrat* now criticized the actions of the mob in 1907 Mississippi. While they admitted that the fluctuating wage scale was in fact a problem, they admonished the actions undertaken in Sumrall: “The time when such disputes could be settled by lawless intimidation and barbarity has passed. The cowardly outrage at Sumrall can no more be justified upon the grounds of race prejudice than it can be condoned upon any other ground.”¹³⁸

Making note of the fact that two contradictory attitudes existed simultaneously, planters and industrialists in favor of recruiting foreigners and

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

popular southern attitudes hostile towards immigrants, is not a new observation.¹³⁹

This pattern and the tension between the rhetoric of employers and that of the people who were competing with Italians for jobs is readily apparent simply by the titles of articles written about the events in Sumrall: the accusatory “Italians *Cause* a Row” (my emphasis), the more neutral “Labor Troubles” or the encouraging “Likes Italian Labor.”¹⁴⁰ One article exhibited both employer paternalism and observed how Italians were in “competition with unskilled white labor;” they noted that Italian laborers did pose an issue because of “social and educational aspects” and that the influx of Italian labor had “not been satisfactory to the class of natives which has been brought into competition.”¹⁴¹

Despite this adversarial relationship, certain press perspectives still declared that the Italian laborer offered the best solution to meet the South’s great demand for labor: “The Italian immigrant, of all others, is perhaps best fitted to the conditions of soil and climate of that region to furnish that labor...Moreover the Italian immigrant is industrious, acquisitive, ready to learn, and quick to adopt higher standards of living and culture as soon as he is financially able to avail himself of them.”¹⁴²

However, press analysis of the Sumrall incident also touched on the latent prejudice regarding Southern (as opposed to Northern) Italians, which I have addressed in other chapters. *The Outlook* explained that “there is a strong disposition to discriminate

¹³⁹ Berthoff, “Southern Attitudes Toward Immigration, 1865-1914,” 328.

¹⁴⁰ “Italians in a Public School Cause a Row at Sumrall, Miss.,” *Daily Picayune*, 1 October 1907; “Labor Troubles in Mississippi: Special Report from *Times Democrat*,” *Macon Beacon*, 5 October 1907 (Macon, MS); “Likes Italian Labor,” *Daily States*, 4 October 1907.

¹⁴¹ “Italians in the South,” *The Outlook*, 16 November 1907.

¹⁴² “The South Wants Italians,” *The Outlook*, 16 November 1907.

against” the newcomers since they are “chiefly from southern Italy and Sicily and belong principally to the peasant class—the very class by the way, the South needs to till its soil and develop its vast agriculture and mineral resources.”¹⁴³ What Sumrall then reveals is how violently a community may respond when they feel that their labor is being diminished or threatened, and ultimately, how tenuous and dangerous of a position those “in-between” possess amongst those bartering for a better socioeconomic position. Given the rivalry between Italian and white laborers and at least according to certain journalistic assertions, the savagery of Scaglioni’s beating was less about where Italians would attend school and more motivated by economic competition.

In the months following the incident, Governor Vardaman ordered an official investigation of the events that transpired in Sumrall.¹⁴⁴ Vardaman concluded that the alleged “outrages” against Italians were “groundless.”¹⁴⁵ While Vardaman dismissed these reports as “absolutely unfounded and ridiculous,” it remains important to recall his history and background. Not only had Vardaman made anti-Italian sentiment one of his chief campaign platforms in his gubernatorial run, he was additionally on record asserting, “Italian children are undesirable aliens.”¹⁴⁶ The Mayor of Sumrall

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ “Guide to the News,” *Daily Picayune*, 17 December 1907; “Current Comment in Mississippi,” *Daily Picayune*, 17 December 1907; “Gov. Vardaman Denies the Story,” *Biloxi Daily Herald*, 31 December 1907 (Biloxi, MS). Founded in 1894, the *Biloxi Daily Herald* was one of the major newspapers of southern Mississippi. According to the press accountings, this official report was ultimately sent to the U.S. State Department.

¹⁴⁵ “Guide to the News,” *Daily Picayune*, 17 December 1907.

¹⁴⁶ “Italians in the South,” *The Outlook*, 16 November 1907; “Gov. Vardaman Denies the Story,” *Biloxi Daily Herald*, 31 December 1907.

concurred with Vardaman as he explained that the “so-called outrage” was more of a “tempest in a teapot.”¹⁴⁷

Yet, new allegations soon surfaced that not only had Italian children been excluded from the public school in Sumrall, but that they had additionally been excluded from entering the state entirely. Governor Vardaman ultimately denied such charges that, “Italian children had been denied entrance into the state of Mississippi.”¹⁴⁸ Regarding the alleged accusations, Vardaman claimed,

It is the first that I have heard of anything of the kind, and it seems so absolutely unfounded and ridiculous that it seems unnecessary to make any statement...No one in this state in official authority has any right to prohibit the entry of any one, children or adults, Italians or any other nationality, into the state, unless it might be in the time of yellow fever or other epidemic disease, with quarantine existing. As to this specific instance I know nothing, and am inclined to believe that there must be some mistake somewhere, unless some local official has exceeded his authority, or else has some valid reason for action which has not yet come to my knowledge and as to reports or views from Washington I have hear nothing.¹⁴⁹

The *Biloxi Daily Herald* scoffed at the Governor’s denial that he had not received any news of the “Italian troubles” in Sumrall, since Vardaman had obtained a detailed report on the matter, and forwarded said report to the Secretary of State in Washington “some three weeks ago.”¹⁵⁰

Affidavits collected by state agents as part of the official investigation concluded that the Italian children who had been excluded from entering the state were of “cleanly habits, free from disease and have been pupils in the public schools

¹⁴⁷ “Current Comment in Mississippi,” *Daily Picayune*, 17 December 1907.

¹⁴⁸ “Gov. Vardaman Denies the Story,” *Biloxi Daily Herald*, 31 December 1907. (Biloxi, MS)

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

in New Orleans...[The] children were born in New Orleans, are Americans in the same degree as any native-born citizen and are therefore free to travel as they will within the limits of the United States.”¹⁵¹ Regardless, Vardaman concluded, “Normal, healthy Italian children, altho [sic] citizens of the United States and residents of New Orleans, are ‘undesirable aliens’ so far as the state of Mississippi is concerned.”¹⁵² Even while Vardaman denied that Italian children had been excluded from the state, he ultimately concluded that the state would have been justified in so doing, citing the right of “declination to admit the children on the ground[s] that they are undesirable immigrants, and as such may be properly excluded by state officials.”¹⁵³ Vardaman’s statements here remain undeniably hostile; again, this was the same governor who earned the nickname “Great White Chief” because of his advocacy of white supremacy. In terms of the nature of his white supremacy, Vardaman’s declarations do fall in line with a kind of Populist pitch to native-born white workers; contemporary opponents noted that it was impossible to determine whether his “reactionary racial doctrine” was a form of “idealism” or “demagoguery.”¹⁵⁴ Yet, as his comments remain in direct contrast with at least some of the press reporting on the Italian incident in Sumrall, Vardaman’s opinions should not be interpreted as necessarily indicative of public opinion in Mississippi, but rather fear-mongering directed at the more extreme xenophobic faction that he represented.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.; “Were Undesirable,” *The Greenville Times*, 5 January 1908. (Washington County, MS)

¹⁵² “Gov. Vardaman Denies the Story,” *Biloxi Daily Herald*, 31 December 1907. (Biloxi, MS)

¹⁵³ “Were Undesirable,” *The Greenville Times*, 5 January 1908. (Washington County, MS)

¹⁵⁴ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, 375. Representative of the historical moment, Vardaman fell in line with other Populist politicians of the time period, like Tom Watson, who invoked as racialized doctrine in order to rally his constituents of working class whites.

In the midst of the “commotion,” the school trustees of nearby Hattiesburg “decided to establish a separate school for the children of all ‘dagoes, Italians, Assyrians and Russian Jews.’”¹⁵⁵ Again, this remains significant and speaks to the transiency of the Italians, since it was not suggested that they attend school with African American students in Hattiesburg. The *Columbus Dispatch* wondered if the trustees’ efforts were “not alone directed against ‘dagoes,’ as the peasantry of Greece, Syria and Italy are commonly termed.”¹⁵⁶ They noted that the prejudice “entertained by native whites, even among the intelligent class...apparently extends to all peoples having their origin in the southwest countries of Europe.”¹⁵⁷ As the *Dispatch* pointed out, “As Italian and Greek bloods are equally as pure white as that of those who people many other European countries, it would be difficult to fathom the opposition to the children of these immigrants, save as it is a dislike of all foreign blood.”¹⁵⁸ This perspective significantly recalls the era’s consideration of the difference between race and color, noting the “pure” whiteness of “Italian and Greek bloods” and therefore concluding the prejudice against Italians must be the result of their foreignness.

While some suggested that it was the foreignness of Italians that marked them as suspect, other press perspectives defended the Italian presence. The *Dispatch* went on to point out that “Many of the citizens in Mississippi are only one or two generations removed from the newly arriving immigrants.”¹⁵⁹ Likewise, the *Meridian Star*, of nearby Meridian, Mississippi, questioned the logic of this xenophobic

¹⁵⁵ “Remarkable Race Prejudice,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, 17 October 1907. (Columbus, MS)

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

bigotry, considering the “impoverished pure white blood” of some of the natives of the South:

Would the Hattiesburg school trustees hold that the children of these men are not fit by birth and breeding to enter the public schools of that place on an equality with native sons and daughters? For that matter as impoverished pure white blood, as stunted intellectual and moral vigor, as any one may wish to find, is sometimes met with among the native sons and daughters of some of our Southern States. There are many thousands of useful, educated and cultured men and women citizens of this country who are not more than a generation removed from the peasantry of Italy or Greece, a peasantry which for centuries has peacefully submitted to the oppressive head of a system of government that has dwarfed and starved their intellectual and physical development. That these people have been able to produce children which under the American school system have demonstrated their fitness for every high calling in life comes from the germ of the unconquerable white blood that centuries of misrule have not destroyed.¹⁶⁰

The *Star*'s perspective here touches on several key points. While making note of the “stunted intellectual and moral vigor” of native southerners, they observe that many immigrants, even those recently of the peasantry of Italy or Greece, are “useful, educated and cultured.” The *Star* additionally points out that it was environmental, not biological, causes that led to the racial backwardness of the Italian peasantry, explaining that it was their oppressive governments that stunted their development. The article concludes by declaring that the Italians possess “unconquerable white blood,” thus, reaffirming their “whiteness,” and offering their ultimate rationale against a separate school for Italians. The Hattiesburg trustees did inquire with the State Attorney General about whether or not they could legally deny the children of

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in “Remarkable Race Prejudice,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, 17 October 1907. (Columbus, MS)

Italian farmers the “privileges of attending white schools.”¹⁶¹ Mr. Fletcher advised against this move, unless they wanted to encourage the interference of the federal government and Italian ambassador in local affairs. Likely in response to this warning, the trustees appear not to have moved forward with their efforts to establish a separate school. Even with this ostensibly clear effort to establish a separate school for Italian schoolchildren, according to the *Dispatch*, the Hattiesburg trustees may have been responding to the perceived “harmful effect” of efforts to “promote Italian immigration as a substitute for negro farm labor.”¹⁶² This again recalls that even with the obvious nativism and xenophobia, an underlying current of the Sumrall incident was the issue of labor and wages.

Like the pattern of violence in the incidences of lynchings against Italians, the members of the mob who attacked Scaglioni were never arrested or held accountable for the violence. In the aftermath, all but two Italian families retreated to Hattiesburg.¹⁶³ Given the fact that the trustees did not move forward with their proposal to establish a separate school for Italians nor was there evidence to suggest that they ever attended the African American school, the Italian schoolchildren presumably went on to attend the local white school in Hattiesburg.

Perhaps an anticlimactic conclusion, in large part due to the limited sources available on the subject, this moment in Sumrall offers evidence of an impending

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ “Quiet At Sumrall. Nearly All of the Italians Transferred to Hattiesburg. Negroes Sent to Sumrall to work the Newman Lumber Company’s Mill,” *Daily Picayune*, 3 October 1907.

shift. While southern states had previously promoted the arrival of immigrants and their labor, Sumrall suggests a turning point. Although a certain tension between planters and industrialists demanding cheap labor and native-born white laborers competing for jobs had always been present, Sumrall signals a rise in nativism even amongst those who had previously encouraged immigration. In the very act of the Newman Lumber Company transferring their Italian employees from Sumrall to Hattiesburg, certain employers in the South were gradually becoming more hostile to their immigrant labor or at least responding to pressure from their native-born white workers. Furthermore, southern legislative decisions were becoming increasingly impelled by anti-immigrant sentiment. For example, while five southern senators and twenty-five southern representatives opposed the literacy test for immigration in 1896, only two southern senators and five in the House dissented by 1913.¹⁶⁴

Present here in Sumrall, Mississippi in 1907 is evidence then of both the fungibility of race and the self-interest of prejudice. Further underscoring their racial transiency, the Italian laborer in Mississippi was undeniably “pure white” to some, while others continued to read them as racially problematic. An existing and expanding nativism in the South justified efforts to exclude these twenty-five Italian/Sicilian children from the white school, even as their Sicilian leader attempted to position themselves within the white mainstream and even while others reaffirmed their whiteness and “pure blood.” Ultimately, this tension, magnified by class conflict and an increasingly threatened native-born white working class, exploded in the

¹⁶⁴ Berthoff, "Southern Attitudes toward Immigration, 1865-1914," 360.

ruthless beating and whipping of Scaglioni. Such an explosive response signals the underlying socioeconomic fears that fueled this conflict.

Chapter 5
“A Miscegenation Mess”:
Legislating Italian Marriages & Whiteness in Louisiana & Alabama

Pietro Albanese, an Italian, and Mary Bossier, listed as “Black” in the U.S. Census, secured a license to marry in Orleans Parish in 1890.² Yet, in 1896 New Orleans, an Italian fruit peddler named Paul Rogudo was taken into custody and charged with miscegenation owing to his “interracial” relationship with a “negro girl” named Agnes Thompson.³ Subsequently, in 1921, Jim Rollins, an African American man, was accused and convicted of violating Alabama’s miscegenation statute since he and Edith Labue, “a white person...did intermarry or live in adultery or fornication with each other, against the peace and dignity of the State of Alabama.”⁴ Yet, the following year, Rollins’s conviction was overturned on appeals; according to the judge, there was “no material evidence” to prove that Labue, an Italian, was in fact a “white woman.”⁵

What should be made of the transient racial assessment of Italians and the inconsistent application of miscegenation laws as they pertained to Italians in Louisiana and Alabama? Were Italians “white,” meaning their marriages to African Americans were illegal and prohibited? If marriages between Italians and African Americans were permissible, what did this mean for the racial placement of Italians in the Gulf South? As the above episodes already reveal, where some of these intimate

¹ “A Miscegenation Mess,” *Daily Picayune*, 15 December 1896.

² 1890 U.S. Census.

³ “A Miscegenation Mess,” *Daily Picayune*, 15 December 1896; “Both Willing,” *Daily States*, 14 December 1896.

⁴ *Rollins v State*, 6 Div. 927, Vol. 278 Transcript (Court of Appeals of Alabama 1921).

⁵ *Rollins v State*, No. 6 Div. 927, 18 Ala. App. 354; 92 So. 35 (Court of Appeals of Alabama 1922).

unions were permitted and others criminalized, Italians under Jim Crow miscegenation statutes defied easy racial categorization. By analyzing these contradictions, this chapter demonstrates how Italians not only occupied a liminal and transient racial status within Gulf South marriage laws, but also how they became progressively included within the category of “white” within marriage assessments. Revealing this development and in contrast to the dominant historiographical readings of the above case, by 1921, Jim Rollins’s acquittal actually serves to reaffirm, rather than dispute, Italian “whiteness.”

In terms of the history of miscegenation laws in the Gulf South, Louisiana’s 1724 *Code Noir*, one of the earliest colonial bans on interracial marriage in what would later become the United States read, “We forbid our white subjects, of both sexes, to marry with the blacks, under the penalty of being fined and subjected to some other arbitrary punishment.”⁶ Yet, in part the result of “rogue colonialism” where local realities contradicted imperial mandates, European men readily defied the ban, thus contributing to Louisiana’s reputation as “wild and unruly.”⁷ Under Spanish-rule of the region, interracial “common-law marriages” and interracial concubinage remained technically forbidden, but not only did European men still skirt the law, Spanish officials generally tolerated the practice because of culturally

⁶ It should be noted that despite the prohibition, enforcement in French-Louisiana was inconsistent and interracial cohabitation persisted as common practice (Virginia Meacham Gould, “A Chaos of Iniquity and Discord’: Slave and Free Women of Color in the Spanish Ports of New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola,” in *The Devil’s Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Michele Gillespie (Oxford University Press, USA, 1997), 232–46); Louisiana’s *Code Noir*, 1724.

⁷ Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire French Colonial New Orleans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 4.

patriarchal family mandates (influenced by the Catholic Church) that required a man to protect and care for his family.⁸ Upon American acquisition of Louisiana, the Civil Digest of 1808, which compiled all existing laws into one document, articulated the latest iteration of Louisiana's marriage ban: "Free persons and slaves are incapable of contracting marriage together... it is the same with respect to the marriage contracted by free white persons with free people of color."⁹ The code considered such marriages "void" and marked their celebrations as "forbidden." While the legal language remained relatively consistent with its colonial antecedent, what had changed by the antebellum era was the fact that efforts to legislate progressively collapsed with local realities as statutes converged with prescripts and social expectations. Despite colonial practice to the contrary, interracial marriage in Louisiana by the nineteenth-century had become legally and socially taboo.

Louisiana law in this regard was by no means unique, as similar provisions were passed elsewhere in the Gulf South during the antebellum era. Although not a specific marriage ban, by 1822 marriages in Mississippi "could only be solemnized 'between any free white persons within the state.'"¹⁰ Florida prohibited marriages between "Blacks and Whites" in 1832 and Alabama banned interracial marriage

⁸ Kimberly S Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Gould, "'A Chaos of Iniquity and Discord': Slave and Free Women of Color in the Spanish Ports of New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola"; Kimberly S Hanger, "Patronage, Property and Persistence: The Emergence of a Free Black Elite in Spanish New Orleans," *Slavery and Abolition* 17, no. 1 (1996): 44-64.

⁹ "A Digest of the Civil Laws now in force in the Territory of Orleans," 1808, 24; Dollar, "Ethnicity and Jim Crow: The Americanization of Louisiana's Creoles." Unlike the *Code Noir*, the new code no longer permitted a free man of color to marry a slave woman in case of pregnancy.

¹⁰ Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford, England; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 21.

twenty years later.¹¹ In 1865, Mississippi officially banned interracial marriage, only one of two states that had seceded without such a prohibition. By the end of the Civil War, twenty-eight of thirty-six states recorded laws to prohibit miscegenation or interracial marriage.¹² But for laws that were intended to legislate against “blacks and whites,” what did this mean for the racially “in-between” Sicilians and other Italians in the Gulf South?

Before delving into an investigation about how Italians problematized miscegenation laws, a brief overview of the concept, practice and historiography of miscegenation is required. Although the concept of legislating against interracial marriages was not a nineteenth-century phenomenon, the nomenclature was in fact a new invention—the term “miscegenation,” meaning the mixing or amalgamation of (racial) blood, was the product of an 1863 anti-Lincoln campaign pamphlet. The naming of this concern in the midst of the Civil War spoke to the growing anxiety concerning the “natural difference between races” and confirms that exogamous marriages began to take on new meaning in a post-emancipation South.¹³ In fact,

¹¹ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*.

¹² While technically these laws were “anti-miscegenation,” I will use the common nomenclature in the existing historiography that identifies laws to prohibit exogamous marriages as “miscegenation” laws. For a clear map of the existing miscegenation laws in 1865, see Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, 42.

¹³ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, 28; A note on language: In her discussion of colonial New Orleans, Jennifer Spear uses “racially exogamous” rather than miscegenation or even “interracial” (in most cases) in order to refrain from imposing racial categorizations that were not used at the time. Because New Orleanians did not have a single word that defined racially (as perceived at the time) mixed relationships, Spear suggests that this is indicative of the fact that they did not define such relationships as belonging to a separate category (Jennifer M Spear, *Race, Sex, and Social Order in Early New Orleans* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). For my purposes, because “miscegenation” marks the particular historical moment under investigation here, I will use interracial, mixed-race marriages to refer to the relationships that miscegenation laws were attempting to legislate against: those marriages and relationships between “whites” and “nonwhites” (including blacks, Latinos, Asians and indigenous peoples). However, I would note that miscegenation laws in the Gulf South remained

Martha Hodes argues that anxiety about sexual relationships between white women and black men was a historical development of the postbellum period, as she contends that white attitudes towards interracial sex did not turn violent until this later period.¹⁴ A “toleration” of relationships across the color line in the antebellum period steadily dissipated in the postbellum era as efforts to legislate against such liaisons increased.

Not only were concerns regarding miscegenation on the rise in the post-Civil War South, but this same era, with the passage of the 14th Amendment, witnessed an increased privileging of citizenship rights. The right to marry, though not always recognized as such, remained a privilege of citizenship and a means of exercising one’s citizenship.¹⁵ As Hannah Rosen has clearly articulated, debates over miscegenation centered on “the question of what emancipation and the enfranchisement of black men would mean for the future significance of race as a social and political category.”¹⁶ Thus offering evidence of the slippage between the political and domestic spheres, contestations over marriage rights were rooted in an effort to claim citizenship, albeit a more “unofficial” means of articulating citizenship. In this sense, citizenship signified more than access to political rights

focused on legislating against a blurring of the specifically “black/white” color line, a point on which I will engage in this chapter.

¹⁴ Martha Elizabeth Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997). Instead, Hodes asserts that white Southerners “tolerated” interracial relationships in the antebellum era, because, “under slavery, such liaisons did not sufficiently threaten the social and political hierarchy—as they would after emancipation” (Ibid., 1). She additionally takes special effort to identify the difference between tolerance and toleration, noting that “*tolerance* implies a liberal spirit toward those of a different mind; *toleration* by contrast suggests a measure of forbearance for that which is not approved” (Ibid., 3). As Hodes explains, she uses “the term *toleration* to describe, in part, white attitudes toward sexual liaisons between white women and black men in the slave South”

¹⁵ Nancy F Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*.

¹⁶ Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 136.

(like rights of suffrage), but rather, the right of civil protection and a struggle over manhood.¹⁷ As a result, this chapter's investigation of the right to marry centers on the concept of "unofficial citizenship," especially considering those instances where "unofficial" actors participated in the constructing citizenship and where the policing of citizenship resulted from more informal or extralegal practices.¹⁸

As discussed in the introduction, not only do laws reveal a social reality, but in line with Peggy Pascoe's canonical work, miscegenation laws operated as a legal factory "for the defining, producing, and reproducing of racial categories."¹⁹ In this sense, marriage laws were a key factor in the state-making project of defining certain populations as residing outside of "official citizenship," just as miscegenation laws contributed to the very real process of "shaping identities and producing race."²⁰ More than simply reflecting social attitudes, these processes of "naming, categorizing and defining" contributed to a process of bureaucratic decision-making that informed and produced social categories and attitudes and served to promote the larger project of white supremacy.²¹ Meanwhile, Charles Robinson argues that efforts to legislate against miscegenation were motivated by a desire to regulate the "intimacy color

¹⁷ Ibid., 131.

¹⁸ Ariela Julie Gross, *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008). As Gross notes, an additional form of "unofficial citizenship" included instances where "state officials kept blacks, Mexican Americans and Asian Americans from voting or sitting on juries even when no state statute or constitutional provision justified their action" (8).

¹⁹ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally, Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, 9.

²⁰ Ibid., 5.

²¹ For example, "A prosecutor who charged a 'Negro man' with marrying a 'white woman' engaged in a very powerful act of naming, categorizing, and defining" (Ibid., 13). Similarly, Nancy Cott argues that marriage laws, which she considers a form of governance and social control, attempted to police race through *intra*racial marriage mandates. These mandates were enforced at three levels of public authority: a couple's immediate community/family, state legislators/judges, and federal laws/policies, which served to "construct racial difference and punished (or in some instances, more simply refused to legitimize) 'race mixture.'" (Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*, 4).

line,” not the “sexual color line.”²² Robinson cites instances of “color closeness,” when violators of the miscegenation laws attempted to emphasize their “whiteness” or “non-whiteness” in order to circumvent the law.

As a result of these various anxieties, miscegenation laws expanded, contracted, protracted and eventually became naturalized within a Jim Crow era where race was considered “knowable.”²³ Ariela Gross explains that courtrooms identified race as a combination of “appearance, ancestry, performance, reputation, associations, science, national citizenship and cultural practice.”²⁴ Even with the growing understanding of ancestry and the increasing popularity of racial science and eugenics, race in the postbellum, southern courtroom, still relied heavily on appearance, performance, association, and “common sense.”²⁵ In this sense, “race was not something imposed from above, imagined by experts and acquiesced to by ordinary people; race was created and re-created every day through the workings of community institutions and individuals in daily life.”²⁶ Rather, such a reliance on community testimony, rumor and reputation reaffirms the extent to which race was locally and regionally constructed. Similarly, as (white) juries retained the prerogative for evaluating an individual’s appearance, the reading of bodies persisted at the center of miscegenation cases. In terms of the enforcement of miscegenation laws in the

²² Charles F Robinson, *Dangerous Liaisons: Sex and Love in the Segregated South* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003).

²³ Ariela Julie Gross, *What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008). “Race was supposed to be knowable...[yet] both black and white knew the reality was often very different from what it was supposed to be” (Ibid., 97).

²⁴ Ibid., 9. What did it mean to be white by association? “Doing the things a white man or woman did—attending white churches or dances, sitting on juries and voting (for men), exhibiting sexual purity (for women)—became the law’s working definition of what it meant to be white” (Ibid.)

²⁵ Ibid., 8, 104.

²⁶ Ibid., 10.

postbellum era, Pascoe explains that policing interracial marriages relied on “public complaints.”²⁷ While interracial adultery, fornication and illicit sex conducted in private was sporadically regulated, interracial relationships became problematic only when the relationship was rendered visible; this meant that couples were generally only arrested if their relationship “threaten[ed] public order or raise[d] community eyebrows.”²⁸

However, just as courts relied on community and unofficial enforcement of miscegenation statutes, the very absence of legal enforcement remains equally telling. Pascoe’s overview of the naturalization of miscegenation laws from 1860s-1960s suggests that the steady decline in the enforcement of miscegenation laws resulted from the extent to which interracial sex had become defined as “unnatural,” meaning certain attitudes had become so naturalized that legal codes were no longer needed to regulate them. Pascoe considers this “popular race-making,” specifically with regards to how the bureaucracy of marriage licensing worked to produce race and naturalize racial classifications. Thus, in this sense, just because there was a decline in arrests and imprisonments of miscegenation law violators in the twentieth century, this does

²⁷ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, 136. Charles F. Robinson also notes that interracial relationships often went unpunished so long as they remained inconspicuous. In order to do this, couples “hid behind a veil of informality” and did not formally marry or live together in order to “deflect public scrutiny” (*Forsaking All Others: A True Story of Interracial Sex and Revenge in the 1880s South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 44).

²⁸ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, 136. Both Pascoe and Gross explain that inheritance disputes, more so than criminal proceedings, were the major instances when interracial marriages found their way into the courtroom. As Gross relates, in these cases, someone would be accused of having “negro blood” in order to delegitimize a marriage and challenge an inheritance claim (Gross, *What Blood Won’t Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America*, 77; Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, 11). Occasionally, men made similar claims in order to justify or validate a divorce as attempting to “absolve themselves of responsibility for their ex-wives after a divorce on the grounds that the women were ‘negro’” (Gross, *What Blood Won’t Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America*, 91).

little to suggest a greater acceptance of interracial relationships. Instead, Pascoe finds that as the enforcement of legal statutes shifted from legislators and judiciaries to the bureaucratic marriage-licensing agents, certain attitudes about race had become so ingrained and so obvious that legal regulation was no longer necessary. Instead, individuals and bureaucrats possessed the prerogative to deny couples the right to marry, and thus, these individualized decisions denied certain privileges of citizenship even without a specific legislative or “official” mandate. Therefore, the very act of prescribing (or denying) citizenship (legally but without an official mandate) worked to prescribe and inscribe modes of racial classifications into the law.

It is in this regard that I consider how Italians and Sicilians were treated within Gulf South miscegenation statutes: how did both official legal mandates and “unofficial” actors participate in constructing (and/or denying) Italian rights to citizenship through the rights of marriage? As previously discussed, Italians were *legally* white, meaning first and foremost that they possessed relatively undisputed access to naturalization and citizenship rights.²⁹ But, did this legal whiteness necessarily translate into “marriage whiteness,” meaning, were Italians “white” when it came to whom they were allowed to marry? Through acts of “popular race-making” via the reading of bodies as well as bureaucratic acts of naming that decided who would be a legally acceptable (not to be conflated with socially acceptable) marriage partner for an Italian (and Sicilian), “unofficial” actors readily participated in the

²⁹ Thomas A Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

ricing of Italians and the construction of their citizenship.³⁰ Ultimately, Italians may still have been “formally” white or have been able to access “formal citizenship.” However, their rights of “informal citizenship” and their legal whiteness when it came to marriage partners were at times debated, occasionally denied and, more often than not, inconsistently assessed and applied.³¹

In this chapter, I analyze the treatment of both Italians and Sicilians in Louisiana and Alabama under the different regions’ miscegenation laws. I begin with an overview of miscegenation laws and major marriage-related court rulings in Louisiana and Alabama. I focus on these regions, first, because Louisiana has often been omitted from studies of miscegenation on the grounds that Louisianans recognized an “intermediate” racial category; this historiographical understanding considers such fluidity as complicating the regulation of and study of miscegenation laws.³² In part, I endeavor to bring Louisiana more fully into the miscegenation

³⁰ The significance of this category is the very absence of law. Evolving from an earlier version of local citizenship, Andreas Fahrmeir might argue that this constitutes “social citizenship” (*Citizenship: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007)). However, the distinction I make here is the fact that “informal citizenship,” while possibly involving state-sponsored actors, resulted from individual and “unofficial” decisions.

³¹ Recall from the introduction, I invoke here Andreas Fahrmeir’s, concept of “formal citizenship,” the legal relationship between individuals and the state as documented by a passport or other legal document. On par with Mae Ngai’s concept of “alien citizens,” I define “informal citizenship” as the social and unofficial consideration of someone as foreign where the policing of citizenship resulted from more informal or extralegal practices, evaluations of performances of citizenship and the reading of bodies (Mae M Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004)).

³² Neither Hodes nor Pascoe devote much attention to Louisiana, nor do they discuss the effect of miscegenation laws upon racially-marked Europeans. Hodes specifically explains why she chose not to use Louisiana in her case study: “I have chosen to omit South Carolina and Louisiana from this study: records relating to racial identity in these states are voluminous, and many such cases are connected to the urban cultures of Charleston and New Orleans. These two cities (along with Mobile, Alabama, and Savannah, Georgia, to some degree) more formally recognized an intermediate class between “black” and “white,” thereby adding another and quite different dimension to the issue of sex across the color line. Stories about sex between white women and black men in South Carolina and Louisiana would doubtless introduce further complexities to the conclusions drawn here” (*White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South*, 12).

historiography and demonstrate that by the turn-of-the-century, Louisiana was altogether connected to the larger web of interregional, southern influences. Second, I focus on these regions because, by the late nineteenth century, New Orleans, Louisiana, as I have previously demonstrated, and Birmingham, Alabama, contained a significant number of Italian immigrants. In fact, by 1930, almost half of Louisiana's 16,000 foreign families were Italian.³³ While Alabama's Italian population was much smaller than Louisiana's, by 1910, 2,696 Italians resided in the state (out of 20,000 foreign born); half of those Italians lived in Birmingham or the surrounding Jefferson County.³⁴ These states remain particular points of inquiry not just because of the presence and significance of their Italian populations but because both states remained particular legislative and judicial battlegrounds for miscegenation cases; in this regard, Alabama becomes a notable focal point since the state produced the infamous *Rollins* case.³⁵ Additionally, despite the previously discussed historiographical presumption that Louisiana adhered to a more fluid set of racial categories than neighboring southern states, a comparative analysis of the treatment of Italians and Sicilians within miscegenation statutes in Louisiana and Alabama provides stronger evidence to support the claim that legal racial categories within the Gulf South were steadily bifurcating by the turn-of-the-century.

Despite provisions that forbade African Americans and Italians from intermarrying, to what extent and with what regularity was there still evidence of

³³ Dino Cinel, "Italians in the South: The Alabama Case," *Italian Americana* 9, no. 1 (October 1, 1990): 8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Certainly, there were other pockets of Italian immigrants throughout the Gulf South, such as the Florida panhandle and the Mississippi Delta, however, I have omitted a discussion of these regions in this chapter because neither were particular legislative grounds for miscegenation cases.

intermarriage between African Americans and Italians? From the legislative history, I move to provide a press review of miscegenation cases involving Italians in Louisiana and Alabama as well as a genealogical investigation of late-19th century and early-20th century Orleans Parish marriage records. In answer to the question of whether Italian legal whiteness necessarily translated into “marriage whiteness,” the answer is both yes and no. While statistically inconclusive, Italians and African Americans did engage in intimate relationships and were in fact granted marriage licenses, regardless of the existing legal mandates. At the same time, in other instances, while some of these “interracial” marriages (for lack of a better word) were granted legal and bureaucratic sanction, other such relationships were considered in violation of the state’s miscegenation statute. Through the evidence of both exclusion and inclusion, this provides further evidence to render Italians (and Sicilians) in the Gulf South as racially transient and within a liminal racial state.³⁶

I conclude this chapter with an extended discussion of *Rollins v State*, the 1922 Alabama Appeals Court case mentioned in this chapter’s introduction. The *Rollins* case involved the overturning of a miscegenation conviction of an African American man, Jim Rollins for his relationship with an Italian woman, Edith Labue. Scholars have concluded that Rollins’ conviction was overturned because Labue’s “whiteness” was found to be inconclusive. Not only do I provide a more comprehensive treatment of this case by joining the few scholars who have actually consulted the court transcripts, but in contrast to the dominant historiographical

³⁶ Here again, citizenship operated as a means to exclude, through the regulating of boundaries and the bureaucratizing of movement, while at the same time offering new means of inclusion, through the crossing of boundaries, the performing of identity and the claiming of rights.

readings of the case, I reveal that the Rollins case does not provide tangible evidence to challenge Italian “whiteness.” Instead, the case actually serves to reaffirm Italian “whiteness, while also providing insight into the hierarchically different racial assessments of Italians and Sicilians. This case offers insight into the larger patterns regarding miscegenation statutes, namely that miscegenation statutes were meant to regulate against interracial intimacy (not necessarily interracial intercourse), while also demonstrating how this case exposes the operations of unofficial citizenship in line with other miscegenation cases in the 1920s Gulf South.

In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, southern states implemented even harsher marriage bans than those passed in the antebellum era. By 1866, Alabama had added a prohibition against interracial marriage to their state constitution, and Mississippi had made interracial marriage a felony with violators punishable by life in prison.³⁷ Yet, under military oversight of the civil rights legislation passed during radical Reconstruction, such prohibitions were gradually removed: Louisiana and Mississippi repealed their bans in 1868 and 1870, respectively, Florida omitted their ban from the state code passed in the early 1870s, and Alabama’s prohibition was declared unconstitutional in 1869.³⁸ Under military

³⁷ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, 30. In Alabama in 1866, an interracial couple faced felony charges and two years in prison if they were found to “intermarry, or live in adultery or fornication with each other” (Ibid., 57). The party responsible for performing the marriage faced a fine of \$100-\$1000 and six months in jail.

³⁸ Peter Wallenstein explains that temporary “personnel changes” in the courts were fully responsible for the discontinuity in the legal response to interracial marriages in postwar Alabama (*Tell the Court I Love My Wife: Race, Marriage, and Law: An American History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 71).

rule, “seven of the eleven former Confederate States, miscegenation laws were repealed, removed from state law codes, or declared unconstitutional.”³⁹

Significantly, the temporary legalization of interracial marriage across the South during this era was not simply the result of federal enforcement of civil rights legislation. A certain amount of resistance to interracial marriage bans was articulated as “unjustifiable restrictions on the rights of White men.”⁴⁰ In this regard, at least some opposition to interracial marriage bans resulted from the perception that such legislation infringed on white male access to black female bodies. Not only does this refute the supposition that white supremacy inherently defied interracial marriage, but reveals that the legalization of miscegenation law and the Reconstruction-era reversal were (in part) ground in an effort to protect the “victimized White man” and an “attempt to reconstruct White male privilege.”⁴¹

However, all five of the states that had repealed their marriage bans during Reconstruction (Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Arkansas, Florida), reinstated them between 1879-1894.⁴² Alabama’s 1901 constitution went even further by banning the legislature from ever passing “any law to authorize or legalize any marriage between any white person and a negro, or descendant of a negro.” Not only

³⁹ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, 41. The seven included Arkansas and the original Confederate states (except for Georgia): Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Texas (Wallenstein, *Tell the Court I Love My Wife: Race, Marriage, and Law: An American History*, 80).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 43-45.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 63. South Carolina reinstated their miscegenation statute in 1879, Mississippi in 1880, Florida in 188, Louisiana in 1894 (Fay Botham, *Almighty God Created the Races: Christianity, Interracial Marriage, and American Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 152). Interracial marriage bans were actually added to the following state constitutions: North Carolina (1876), Florida (1885), Mississippi (1890), South Carolina (1895) and Alabama (1901) (Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, 63).

was this part of the legislative program of white supremacy, but Rosen argues that anti-miscegenation was part of a rhetorical terror that constructed African Americans as socially, sexually and politically dangerous. Such discourse conflated “political empowerment” with “race-mixing,” which meant that miscegenation laws were a kind of protest against African Americans as “legitimate patriarchs.”⁴³ Accordingly, despite the semantic claim, miscegenation laws were not necessarily rooted in a fear of “physical amalgamation” or mixing of blood, but were rooted in a contest over citizenship claims and the rights of manhood.

Just as critical as considering the participation of white legislators in the temporary legalization of miscegenation laws in the Reconstruction era, it remains equally germane to take into account why black legislators would have participated in the re-codification of miscegenation laws in the post-Reconstruction era. In an earlier work, Rosen (2005) argues that the willingness of black legislators to accept interracial marriage bans resulted from their concern with “righting a past and extant wrong—the rape of black women by white men.”⁴⁴ Black legislative support for miscegenation laws was thus rooted in an effort “to protest a long-silenced history of sexual violence and the hypocrisy of white men on the issue of cross-racial sex.”⁴⁵ As a result, certain black legislators proclaimed their support for post-Reconstruction miscegenation bans as a means of protecting and/or claiming black women from

⁴³ Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 136.

⁴⁴ Hannah Rosen, “The Rhetoric of Miscegenation and the Reconstruction of Race: Debating Marriage, Sex, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Arkansas,” in *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World*, ed. Pamela Scully and Diana Paton (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), 303.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 304.

white men, thus reaffirming the extent that support for and against miscegenation laws were motivated by gendered concerns.

Thus, by the 1870s, miscegenation laws had already begun to make their steady resurgence throughout the South, constitutionally validated by a series of local and federal court rulings. The decision in *Gibson v State* (Indiana, 1871) conferred the supremacy of state rights concerning marriage laws over federal civil rights; as a result, the court established a precedent that defined marriage as more than a contract (thus, beyond the protection of the 14th amendment) and under the jurisdiction of the state police (thus, outside of federal control).⁴⁶ In *Pace v Alabama* (1881), Tony Pace, a black man, appealed his miscegenation conviction on the grounds that his punishment violated the 14th amendment since he was sentenced to a longer term than those convicted of same-race adultery. The Appeals Court upheld his conviction and further affirmed that interracial marriage bans did not in fact violate the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment since interracial sex was a specific and worse crime than same-race sex, thus warranting a more extreme punishment.⁴⁷ As the court concluded,

The evil tendency of the crime of living in adultery or fornication is greater when it is committed between persons of the two races, than between persons of the same race. Its result may be the amalgamation of the two races, producing a mongrel population and a degraded civilization, the prevention of which is dictated by a sound public policy affecting the highest interests of society and government.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, 56.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁸ *Pace & Cox v the State*, 69 Ala. 231 (Supreme Court of Alabama 1881).

Additionally, because states allegedly punished both “offending part[ies], white and black,” in the same way, the court legitimized prohibitions against interracial marriage and validated longer sentences when “defendants were of different races.”⁴⁹ As part of the extended process of naturalizing interracial marriage bans, Pascoe explains that *Pace* constructed miscegenation as “something real, definable, and punishable” while also offering “an illusion of equal protection that made miscegenation laws seem so natural that they weren’t racially discriminatory at all.”⁵⁰ The U.S. Supreme Court went on to reaffirm the constitutionality of *Pace v State* ruling in 1883.

Yet, just as miscegenation was becoming legally definable, understandings of and abilities to define race remained vague. For example, Louisiana prohibited “marriage between white persons and persons of color” in 1894.⁵¹ Realizing that the statute had not gone far enough, Louisiana went on to specify in 1908 that “concubinage [defined as those living together or found in cohabitation] between a person of the Caucasian or white race and a person of the negro or black race is hereby made a felony.”⁵² Still, Louisiana law did not account for those who were neither “white” nor were clearly definable as “negro” or “black.”

The consolidating of Louisiana’s racial categories, or rather, the question of how to categorize those who did not fit into the prescribed legal categories of “white” or “black” remained at the forefront of the landmark discussions in *State v*

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, 69.

⁵¹ *Louisiana Civil Code*, Amd. Act 54, 1894, 63.

⁵² *Acts Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana*, Act No. 87, 1908.

Treadaway. In 1910, Octave Treadaway was indicted for violating Louisiana's miscegenation statute; Treadaway was initially acquitted on the grounds that he was an "octoroon" and had, therefore, not in fact violated the statute.⁵³ The state appealed the acquittal arguing, "An octoroon was a person of the Negro or black race within the meaning of the statute," meaning, his cohabitation with a white woman violated the parameters of the 1908 concubinage statute.⁵⁴ As a result, the Supreme Court of Louisiana undertook a painstaking evaluation of whether or not an "octoroon" was in fact a "negro," despite the prosecution's contention that the "word does not need to be defined in a statute; that popularly it has a definite, well-known meaning; and that in this popular acceptance it includes all persons having in their veins a perceptible admixture of negro blood."⁵⁵ Significantly, the court's investigation was rooted in whether a "popular" understanding of race was legally and conclusively admissible.

The court began by analyzing countless dictionary definitions to determine whether "octoroon" was generally subsumed within the definition of "negro." They went on to assess the manner in which Louisiana's nearby "sister states" utilized the same racial terminology. The court ultimately found that "negro" and "colored" were never in fact used interchangeably.⁵⁶ Because "negro" and "colored" were not

⁵³ *State v Treadaway*, No. 18,149, 126 La. 300; 52 So. 500 (Supreme Court of Louisiana 1910). Treadaway had been indicted and acquitted of violating the aforementioned Act No. 87 of 1908.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*. The court continued, "Scientifically, or ethnologically, a person is Caucasian or negro in the same proportion in which the two strains of blood are mixed in his veins; and therefore scientifically, or ethnologically, a person with seven-eighths white blood in his veins and one-eighth negro blood is seven-eighths white and one-eighth negro. But the words of a statute are not to be understood in their technical, but in their popular sense, and the prosecution contends that the popular meaning of the word "negro" includes an octoroon" (2).

⁵⁶ Finally, the court concluded: "We do not think there could be any serious denial of the fact that in Louisiana the words "mulatto," "quadroon," and "octoroon" are of as definite meaning as the word "man" or "child," and that, among educated people at least, they are as well and widely known...Nor can there be, we

synonyms, the Supreme Court of Louisiana upheld Treadaway's acquittal. Probably, as a result of the debate that ensued in the *Treadaway* case, later that year, Louisiana revised its miscegenation statute to read: "Concubinage between a person of the Caucasian or white race and a person of the colored or black race is hereby made a felony."⁵⁷

Nevertheless, what did any of this mean for Italians, and where did Italians fit into these statutes? According to racial taxonomies of the time, Italians were not officially, anthropologically "Caucasian," nor were they "colored," since according to the Louisiana courts, the term "colored" was used to designate "a person of mixed negro and other blood, which has been coined for the very purpose of expressing that meaning."⁵⁸ But for those who did not necessarily have "negro" blood, were they still legally definable as "colored"? As the courts in Louisiana had determined, "These decisions are authority that a negro is necessarily a person of color; but not that a person of color is necessarily a negro. There are no negroes who are not persons of color; but there are persons of color who are not negroes."⁵⁹ Yet, because a "person of color," by definition, possessed "negro" blood, Italians would have been judicially and legally declared outside such categorization. As a result, the courts inherently

think, any serious denial of the fact that in Louisiana, and, indeed, throughout the United States (except on the Pacific slope), the word "colored," when applied to race, has the definite and well-known meaning of a person having negro blood in his veins...The contention of the prosecution is that the word "negro" is synonymous with "colored"—no matter in what connection it is used. This is not so. Had it been so, the law forbidding marriages would have used the word "negro," and not the word "colored"; for "negro" would then have been the natural and obvious word to use" (Ibid., 11-12).

⁵⁷ *Acts Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana*, Act No. 206, 1910. Similarly, as a result of *Biscombe & Bisseuseur v Rex*, where a woman was acquitted of a miscegenation charge since an "Indian" was ruled as a separate category from a "coolie." Louisiana's *Acts passed by the General Assembly* in 1920 expanded the categories of exclusion by "prohibiting marriage between persons of the Indian race and persons of the colored or black race."

⁵⁸ *State v Treadaway* (Supreme Court of Louisiana, 1910).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

rendered those, like Italians, who were not “Caucasian” and who were not “negro” or “colored,” into a liminal racial space. In so doing, assigning Italians to a liminal racial space resulted in problematizing marriage rights and miscegenation laws in the Gulf South.

Miscegenation in the Archives: A Genealogical Review of Orleans Parish Marriage Records

This liminal space is most clearly seen within those cases not necessarily found in the criminal or judicial records, but within those relationships granted official sanction via the privilege of a marriage license. These allowances take on further significance when taken into consideration with what Pascoe reminds about the impact of marriage records and marriage licensing on the codification of race and the fact that racial classifications were steadily naturalized within the bureaucracy of marriage licensing.⁶⁰ Not only did eugenicists help to develop marriage-licensing regulations, but the National Uniform Marriage and Marriage Licensing Act (1911) required that marriage licenses include an individual’s “color” or “race.” As a result, and as Pascoe explains, bureaucratic marriage license clerks became a sort of gatekeeper as they made extralegal assessments about bodies (which served to confer or deny citizenship rights). Further revealing the impact of “informal citizenship,”

⁶⁰ Pascoe finds that as the enforcement of legal statutes shifted from legislators and judiciaries to the bureaucratic marriage-licensing agents, certain attitudes about race had become so ingrained and so obvious that legal regulation was no longer necessary. She further explains, “If local officials did their work well, they would foster the social invisibility of interracial sex and marriage by, in effect, erasing interracial couples from national marriage statistics” (Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America*, 139).

individuals and bureaucrats possessed the prerogative to deny couples the right to marry, and thus, these individualized decisions denied certain privileges of citizenship even without a specific legislative or “official” mandate.⁶¹ The inverse of this operation remains equally telling, meaning that just as marriage licensing agents may have denied certain couples marriage licenses based on their unofficial racial assessment, these same bureaucrats maintained the prerogative of conferring validity and official sanction by granting marriage licenses to other couples. Therefore, performing a genealogical analysis of the Orleans Parish marriage records, which uncovers those instances whereby Italian and African American couples were in fact granted marriage licenses, offers significant insight into the racial placement and civic status of Italians in the Jim Crow Gulf South.⁶²

⁶¹ While government employees may be seen as agents of the state and enacting “formal” mandates of citizenship, I still consider these actors contributing to “informal” citizenship because these marriage-licensing officials were reading bodies and making decisions about who could/should marry outside of the explicit mandates of the law.

⁶² A note about my methods: While I do not report the following as necessarily quantifiable or quantitative, what follows is a sampling of cases that have been otherwise unreported or unnoticed in the historical record. I began by browsing the marriage records for Orleans Parish, Louisiana, available online from Louisiana’s Secretary of State website. I chose to survey 1890, 1900 and 1915, in order to gain a sampling of the marriages from different historical moments, as well as to gauge whether or not marriage patterns appeared to change along with the passage of increasingly restrictive miscegenation statutes. (I had originally chosen to survey 1890, 1900 and 1910 in order to provide a sampling of officially sanctioned marriages in Orleans before and after the passage of Louisiana’s increasingly stringent miscegenation codes, however, the marriage licensing records from 1910-1914 remain incomplete. As a result, I have surveyed 1915 in order to provide a sense of those marriages which received official sanction in New Orleans after the passage of Louisiana’s 1908 miscegenation statute.) While browsing, I took note of Italian surnames, accounting for those instances when Italian surnames were linked with other Italian surnames (thus denoting an Italian/Italian marriage); I also took note of moments when Italian surnames (or surnames that could possibly or plausibly be Italian) were linked with non-Italian surnames. Upon compiling this list, I began a genealogical investigation of those hypothetical intermarriages; from marriage records to birth/death certificates to Census data, I tracked race, birthplace and parentage in order to determine the best approximation of the ancestral background of these marriage contracts. My underlying question remained: to what extent did Italians and African Americans intermarry and were these marriages considered to be in violation of miscegenation laws? Again, what follows is not definitive or quantitatively conclusive, but I have in fact found moments that reveal that practices on the ground readily defied the legal statutes while also circumventing the criminal record.

In 1890, at least 140 of the 2,165 officially sanctioned marriages in Orleans Parish (or 6.5%) were inter-Italian.⁶³ Throughout 1890 in Orleans Parish, Italians also regularly intermarried with other non-Italians; Italian/German, Italian/Irish and Italian/French were the most common.⁶⁴ While not typical, I did in fact find several cases of officially sanctioned marriages between Italians and African Americans. For example, Mary Albanese, born in December of 1878, was the daughter of an Italian named Pietro Albanese; according to her 1900 Census record, she was also “Black.”⁶⁵ Even without evidence that Mary’s mother, a “Mulatto” woman by the name of Josephine, officially married Pietro, records do show that Pietro married a “Black” woman named Mary Bossier in 1890 Louisiana.⁶⁶ When Pietro died, Mary Albanese continued to live with her stepmother in a diverse neighborhood made up of other Italians, Germans, Irish, Scottish (immigrants and native-born), as well as “Blacks,” and “Mulattos.” Significantly, the marriage between Mary Bossier (“Black”) and Pietro Albanese (racially ambiguous but certainly Italian) was granted legal sanction via their 1890 marriage license, nor was there any evidence to suggest that their marriage was ever criminalized; additionally, their diverse neighborhood was notably typical for 1890s New Orleans, with Italians living side-by-side with both other “white” immigrants and “blacks.”

⁶³ In addition to surveying all 2,165 marriage records for 1890 Orleans parish, I have performed a complete genealogical analysis for about 10% of those marriages.

⁶⁴ I also found several cases of Spanish/German and Irish/Portuguese/German marriages.

⁶⁵ 1900 U.S. Census.

⁶⁶ 1890 U.S. Census; in the 1880 Census, Pietro’s name was listed as Peter Albinez and the notation of his race appears to be W that was turned into an M.

Similarly, in 1890 Orleans Parish, Angele Fabio (variously categorized as “Black” or “Mulatto”), married Brou Mathe Jr. (also variously categorized as “Black” or “Mulatto”).⁶⁷ This marriage in and of itself is not necessarily noteworthy, except for the fact that Angele’s father was born in Italy and spoke Italian.⁶⁸ In this regard, Angele Fabio was likely the child of an “interracial” relationship between a person of color and an Italian.

Joseph Giuseppe Lavizzo, born in 1820 Milan, Italy, offers another example of an intimate relationship (although perhaps not an official marriage) between an Italian and a person of color. Lavizzo immigrated to the United States sometime before the Civil War and fought in the war on behalf of the Confederacy as part of the 6th Regiment European Brigade. As a member of the Louisiana Militia (Italian Guards Battalion), he earned the rank of Captain, after which point he and his wife Catharine had a “White” daughter named Lucy Lavizzo in 1865 Louisiana.⁶⁹ It appears that Joseph had another child named Joseph Lavizzo in about 1863 with a woman named Elizabeth Hawkins. Although Elizabeth Hawkins’s race cannot be verified, her son Joseph Lavizzo was variously categorized as “Mulatto” and “Black;” this meant that Hawkins was likely of mixed race, since Lavizzo’s Italian-born father was consistently reported as “White.” Joseph Lavizzo (II) married a “Mulatto” woman by

⁶⁷ 1900-1940 U.S. Census. The apparent changeability of racial categorization, a pattern that will reappear throughout this section, remains a product of the human component of Census taking and contributes to the indeterminacy of the Census as a source.

⁶⁸ 1920 U.S. Census. Although this reference to Angele’s parentage is unsubstantiated by other Census records, this reference to Angele’s Italian ancestry appears a particular coincidence—while common for the birthplace of an entire neighborhood to be listed as “Louisiana,” when Census takers made the marked effort to note an individual’s foreign place of birth, that appears to be an intentional notation and offers relatively definitive insight into an individual’s parentage.

⁶⁹ 1870 U.S. Census.

the name of Aimee Dauphin in 1880; she passed away after giving birth to four children, including Joseph Lavizza Jr. (“Colored”) in 1885. Joseph Lavizzo (II) remarried another “Mulatto” woman by the name of Ella Monroe in 1890 Louisiana. This line of the Lavizzo family, despite being consistently recorded in the U.S. Census as “Mulatto,” “Colored” or “Black,” appears to be the descendants of the Italian-born, “White” Joseph Lavizzo. While this may appear simply reminiscent of certain relationships between white slave owners and their slaves, it does remain significant that Joseph Giuseppe Lavizzo recognized and legitimized his mixed-race son by passing on his last name.

Like Peter Consentino (whose parents were born in Sicily), who married a “Black” woman named Henriette Whalen in July of 1890 Louisiana, at least several Italians in 1890 Orleans Parish entered into an interracial marriage.⁷⁰ Although I found a finite number of Italian/Black marriages and I cannot claim that Italians and persons of color intermarried with any sort of regularity, it remains significant that these relationships did in fact occur. Of note, these were not cases of simply interracial concubinage, but at least several involved official bureaucratic recognition that granted the couple an official marriage license. Notably, of the cases I found in

⁷⁰ In February 1890 Louisiana, George Holt (a “White” man whose parents were born in England and Nova Scotia, respectively) married Louisa Arsaga, whose father was born in Manila, Philippines and racially categorized as EI (East Indian). Even these marriages between a half-Asian woman and a white/northern European man received the legal approval and validation from the state. I found a similar case in the 1900 Census, where Cecilia Delcarpio, categorized as “White,” though her father was born in Manila, Philippines, married one William Roldan, also “White” and also born in the Philippines. While this was not an “interracial” marriage, per se, it is noteworthy to remember that the Census categorized Filipinos as “White,” at least in 1900. Even later, in 1915, Eusebia Delcarpio was listed as “White,” despite the fact that her father was born in the Philippines and her mother was French. Like Cecilia, Eusebia’s marriage to the German-born Fernand Warren Karcher appeared not to have crossed any racial boundaries as the couple was granted a marriage license.

1890, the majority involved an Italian/“White” man and a woman of color; I will subsequently return to the significance of this gendered pattern.⁷¹

By 1900, although I still found several cases of Italian/European or Italian/“native-born White” marriages, I found a decreasing number of Italian/Italian marriages.⁷² I account for both of these occurrences as the result of a decrease in Italian immigration to Louisiana and thus a decrease in Italian marriage partners (since the apex of Italian immigration to the region occurred earlier than the wave of Italian immigrants to northern urban centers like New York), as well as the fact that second and third generations of immigrants intermarrying meant that an increasing number of residents were of a more mixed-European background.⁷³ All that being said, I still found several cases of “White” Italians being granted marriage licenses to marry a “Black” partner, even after Louisiana prohibited “marriage between white persons and persons of color” in 1894.⁷⁴ For example, Nicholas Provanzano, born in Italy in 1862, immigrated to the United States in 1870. Despite the fact that the Census registered him as “White,” he married a “Black” woman of French origin named Angela in 1895.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Similarly, in both the antebellum and post-bellum eras, interracial relationships that escaped adjudication were more common between white men/slave women or white men/black women (Robinson, *Forsaking All Others: A True Story of Interracial Sex and Revenge in the 1880s South*, Chapter 3).

⁷² In addition to surveying all 2,386 marriage records for 1900 Orleans parish, I have performed a complete genealogical analysis for about 10% of those marriages.

⁷³ Anthony V Margavio and Jerome J Salomone, *Bread and Respect: The Italians of Louisiana* (Gretna, La.: Pelican Pub. Co., 2002), 44. I did find a few cases of Italian/English and Italian/Spanish marriages.

⁷⁴ *Louisiana Civil Code*, Amd. Act 54, 1894, p. 63.

⁷⁵ 1900 U.S. Census. Similarly, according to the 1880 U.S. Census, James Marcadel, a “White” man born in Spain married a “Black” woman named Marie Delery sometime after the Civil War; their son, Oscar Delery, was listed as “Mulatto.”

Another peculiar case worth analyzing is the Facio/Fascio/Fascia/Facsis family.⁷⁶ In 1880 Louisiana, Amerigo Facio (White, whose mother was born in Spain) was living with his wife, Louisa Facio (White) and their children, Alcie, Noemi, Cermense and Louise.⁷⁷ Yet, by 1900, Amerigo Fascia was listed as “Black,” along with his wife Louisa, and, among their other children, their son Albert Facsis; significantly, Amerigo reported that his father had been born in Italy.⁷⁸ Despite being listed as “Black” in 1900, Amerigo and Louisa were categorized as “White” in 1910.⁷⁹ Albert Fascio appeared in 1900 as “Black,” as “Mulatto” in 1910, “Black” in 1920 and “White” on his World War I Draft Registration Card; yet, in 1900, he married a “Black” woman by the name of Eugenie Taylor. As a result of this complicated and contradictory genealogical record, this offers further evidence of the liminal racial identity of Italians, as it appears that Amerigo’s Italian and Spanish/Cuban ancestry may have been the cause for why his family appeared to “change” race between 1880-1910.⁸⁰ According to Census-takers, Amerigo’s race was tangible, transient and far from static or a foregone conclusion.⁸¹

⁷⁶ I have preserved the original/various spellings here, even though I have confirmed (using birthdates) that these surnames identify individuals from the same family.

⁷⁷ 1880 U.S. Census; according to the 1880, Amerigo’s mother was born in Spain.

⁷⁸ 1900 U.S. Census. Still noting that his mother had been born in Spain, the transcription of the 1900 Census form records Amerigo as Armengo Fascia, however, upon consultation of the actual census form, I consider this as transcription error and will continue to refer to him as Amerigo. According to the Census, Amerigo’s father was born in Italy, while his mother was born in Spain. Their children in 1900 included Albert, Manuel, Arnold, Alcie and Noemi, thus confirming that despite differences in spelling, this was, in all likelihood, the same family.

⁷⁹ Amerigo’s father was still reported as Italian and his mother was reported as Spanish/Cuban.

⁸⁰ The Reggio family appears to be another case whether they appear to change races: Mary Ophelia was born to Ensibe Reggio and Ophilia Reggio in 1861; in 1870 and 1900, all members of the family were listed a “White.” However, in 1860, Mary Reggio and both her parents were categorized as “Mulatto.” While there is not definitive evidence that the Reggio family was of Italian ancestry, their last name appears to be of Italian origin and the family appears to have had some phenotypic markers that served to problematize their ability to be easily racially categorized. The following marriages found in 1900 Orleans also represent instances where the individuals appear to change races overtime: Octave Dugas and Rita Fauria, listed as

The inverse pattern may be observed in the marriage of Frank Wyman to Lucy Parigori, who although they already had three children together (Louisa, Alice and Oudy), did not officially take out a marriage license until 1900. This union initially reads as a “White,” European marriage, though strangely, they repeatedly reported their ancestry differently (or else their ancestry was mis-recorded on multiple occasions): in 1900, Frank’s mother was born in Germany; in 1910, Lucy’s father was born in Italy, while Frank’s mother was born in France; by 1930, although Lucy’s father was still reported as having been born in Italy, Frank’s parents were both listed as having been born in Louisiana.⁸² The background of this couple becomes further complicated by the fact that strangely, in 1920, Census takers read Lucy and Frank as “Mulatto,” even while Frank reported that his father had been born in Italy. And while the simplest interpretation would be that this 1920 listing represents a different family, such a conclusion remains unlikely since their offspring similarly “changed” races during this same period. In 1910, John Osborne, of Irish and English descent was married to Louise Wyman, the daughter of Lucy and Frank.

mulatto in 1920 and partially of Cuban descent, the family “became white” by 1930-40; George Trevigne and Marie Auguste, a Mexican/mulatto family who “became white” by 1910.

⁸¹ The Chiapella Family presents another case of a family “changing races” or at least being bureaucratically read differently in different historical moments: in 1900 Orleans Parish, Emma Chiapella married Ernest Edmunds. As of 1900, both Emma and Ernest were read as “White” by Census takers; Emma (along with her father and the rest of her family) were also read as “White” in 1870 and 1910. Yet, in 1880, Census takers labeled Emma (and her father Achel/Achilles Chapella) as “Mulatto;” Achille and his wife Orelia/Amelia were similarly read as “Mulatto” in 1860. Emma’s husband Ernest was also read as “Mulatto” by Census takers in 1870 (1870-1880 U.S. Census). Yet, by 1900, the Chiapella and Edmunds family were officially “White.” While this case does not present verifiable evidence of an Italian connection, it remains significant that a family with Latin (Spanish, if not Italian) connections could racially morph from Mulatto to White. Additionally, where I was unable to find concrete evidence of an Italian connection, the 1900 Orleans marriages of Paul Gray & Anna Romeo, Henry Mack & Pauline Zido, Bertha Mack & Alex Zido and Laura Joseph & Albert Bruno all offer evidence of intra-racial Black/Mulatto marriages with individuals with Italian surnames and (arguably) Italian ancestry.

⁸² Again, as mentioned with regards to how race was recorded, this variability as a result of human choice/error remains a problem with the Census as a source in general.

While in 1910 the couple was listed as White, their son Frank Osborne (Frank and Lucy's grandson) was recorded as Black in 1920. Despite the apparent European origins of the Wyman and Osborne family, they appear to have been read as "Mulatto" and non-white by 1920.

The fact that Italians (as well as those of Latin and/or Spanish descent) appear to "change races" reveals several things. First, this demonstrates that by 1900, bureaucrats (census takers and marriage licensing agents alike) were less comfortable with interracial marriages; despite a person's "actual" ancestry, a couple was assigned the same race within official designations.⁸³ Second, this demonstrates evidence of the fact that Italians, in many cases, were in fact phenotypically darker, thus causing bureaucratic agents to read and mark their race as non-white; in these cases, Sicilians and other Italians were not "white on arrival," but white depending on who was doing the reading. This shifting of racial assignments presents further evidence of the racial transiency of Italians and the racially liminal space that they occupied.

By 1915, I found numerous marriages between Italians and Europeans (especially Germans) as well as Italian/"native-born White" marriages. However, I found no evidence of Italians intermarrying with persons of color.⁸⁴ This decline (in marriage licenses, not necessarily intimate relationships) certainly corresponds to the increasing specificity of Louisiana's miscegenation statutes; recall that "marriage

⁸³ Pascoe additionally argues that even with an observable decline in miscegenation laws during the twentieth century, this has less to do with a growing comfortability with interracial marriage and more a result of the steady naturalizing of intra-racial marriages.

⁸⁴ In addition to surveying all 3,089 marriage records for 1915 Orleans parish, I have performed a complete genealogical analysis for about 8% of those marriages; a similar number to those in 1890 and 1900 (but much smaller percentage) of registered marriages were between Italians and other Italians.

between white persons and persons of color” was prohibited in 1894 and “concubinage between a person of the Caucasian or white race and a person of the negro or black race” was made a felony in 1908.⁸⁵ I did still come across several cases of intra-racial marriages of color involving individuals with potentially Italian surnames, like the marriage of Leonie Pizero to August Ellsworth and Agnes Reggio to William Smith.⁸⁶ Of note, I did find one instance of a marriage between an Italian and a person of Mexican descent: Letteria Agnes Messina (born in Italy) married Joseph Paul Durapau in 1915. Joseph’s mother was born in Mexico (though her father was possibly born in France). Thus, in the case of the Messina and Durapau marriage (a relationship between someone of Italian and of Mexican/French descent), both individuals were categorized as “White,” and the marriage did not appear to be criminalized. Yet, at the same time, in the case of Francisca Michaela Tio and Willie Williams, both of these individuals were variously classified as “Mulatto” or “Black,” and Francisca’s father was of Mexican origin. Thus, it appears that by 1915, Mexicans as well occupied a liminal racial space, where neither their marriages with Italians nor persons of color were criminalized.

As in 1910, I still encountered instances in 1915 of Italians “changing” races. For example, Rosalie Sconza married Louis Gabriel in 1915; as of 1920 (and 1930),

⁸⁵ *Louisiana Civil Code*, Amd. Act 54, 1894, p. 63; *Acts Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana*, Act No. 87, 1908. While I have already cautioned against how we should not presume that legal changes necessarily correspond to enforcement of those practices, the hardening of Louisiana’s miscegenation statutes would have at least been a factor in the decline in the number of legally sanctioned marriage licenses issued between Italians and persons of color after the turn-of-the-century.

⁸⁶ Despite the surname “Pizero,” both Leonie and August were consistently read as either “Black” or “Mulatto” by census takers between 1880 and 1930. Alternatively, census takers read Agnes Reggio as “White” throughout records between 1900 and 1920, yet her grandfather was recorded as “Multatto” in 1870.

both were registered with Italian fathers and both were classified as “White.” Likewise, while census takers in 1900 read Rosalie and her family as “White,” in 1910, Rosalie, her siblings and her son (Goodwin Sansorrich) were all marked as Mulatto.⁸⁷ This suggests that even after the turn-of-the-century, Italian racial identity was still at times tenuous enough to be subjectively defined by bureaucratic agents.⁸⁸ Yet, the fact that I did not come across a definitive marriages between an Italian and a person of color in 1915 speaks to the fact that not only were interracial marriages being regulated into invisibility, but, that Italians in Louisiana by this later moment were less racially transient and less racially subjective as they ultimately moved into a more definitively “white” position within the racial hierarchy of the Jim Crow Gulf South.

Miscegenation in the Press

However, just as certain marriages between Italians and African Americans may have been legally permitted in Louisiana (at least in the earlier 1890s), an equal number were made visible, either by the law or within the local press. For example, in

⁸⁷ Somewhat similarly, Mary Rose Sapoleto and Edward Plicque took out a marriage license in 1915; according to Edward’s birth certificate (and 1900-1930 Census records), he was alternately “colored,” “black,” “negro” and “mulatto.” Yet, at least according to his registration card, this same Edward was “white” by the time he was drafted in WWII. Additionally, while Mary’s ancestry is unverifiable within the available data, her surname was most certainly of Italian origin.

⁸⁸ Only tangentially related to the case of Italians, the subjectivity of racial identity in the case of Carmelite/a Alletto and Hans Richter. Soon after the couple married (sometime between 1915-1920), the 1920 Census registered them both as white, Hans having been born in Germany. Carmelita’s ancestral origins, however, remain a bit more difficult to quantify. Carmelita’s father, Alastasses/Hassie, was born in the Philippines though his native tongue was Spanish. Even Census takers in 1900 seemed unsure of how to categorize Hassie, as they left his racial category ambiguously labeled; from the actual census form, a “B” (for Black) appears super-inscribed over a previous notation. Meanwhile, in both 1900 and 1910, Carmelita’s mother, Ameliz/Emilia was classified as white and of Louisianan origins. And, despite the fact that Carmelita was white in 1900 and from 1920-1930, she was clearly identified by Census takers in 1900 as Mulatto. This presents evidence of an officially sanctioned interracial marriage as late as 1915.

1896 New Orleans, an Italian fruit peddler named Paul Rogudo was taken into custody and charged with abducting a “negro girl” named Agnes Thompson.⁸⁹ This incident remains especially noteworthy for several reasons. First, one of the newspaper articles on the incident titled their report “A Miscegenation Mess.” Of course, this may have served the purpose of journalistic hyperbole, but the fact remains that the popular understanding of the relationship between Rogudo and Thompson, even in 1890s Louisiana, was that their relationship was *interracial* and violated the state’s miscegenation statute: “The Italian stated that he was willing to marry the girl, and she was also willing to accept him as her husband. This request, however, could not be granted, as it would be in violation of the anti-miscegenation law.”⁹⁰ Significantly, the tone of the press rhetoric remained rather sympathetic on the matter: “An Italian Fruit Man and a Negro Girl Love Each Other and Were Anxious to Marry—They are Now Separated.”⁹¹ As the *Daily States* reported, “both [were] willing” but the marriage was not allowed due to the “the presence on the statute books of the anti-miscegenation law.”⁹² Accordingly, it was “the law” that would not sanction the marriage, not social convention. Of note, even though the press recorded Rogudo as “Italian,” never as “white,” they went on to explain that Rogudo “said he would marry the girl and she was willing to have him as a husband, but the laws prevent a marriage of the races.”⁹³

⁸⁹ “A Miscegenation Mess,” *Daily Picayune*, 15 December 1896.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ “Both Willing,” *Daily States*, 14 December 1896.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

The only reason that this case even made it into the press record appears largely the result of Thompson's mother being unwilling to grant her approval for the marriage. Thompson had run away from home, until her mother found her "living with the Italian and had her taken in charge, as she refused to leave the man."⁹⁴ Notably, the *Daily States* described Thompson as "comely," "quite good looking," and "attracted attention."⁹⁵ This language, reminiscent of the exoticized consumption and commodification of mulatto women that contributed to the widespread French colonial practices in New Orleans of Octoroon Balls and *plaçage*, recalls that octoroon women (and other light-skinned women of color) were especially sought after.⁹⁶ Historically, this meant that free black women were enabled to make pragmatic choices in their relationships with white European men in order to secure educational advantages and economic security for themselves and their children.⁹⁷ In this regard, offering further evidence to explain why this particular relationship between Rogudo and Thompson was criminalized and perhaps indicative of the fact that anti-Italian stigma was so widespread, it appears that Thompson's mother felt that Rogudo was not in fact the most pragmatic choice (economically or socially) for her daughter, despite their mutual affection. Additionally, as previously discussed, *interracial* relationships only entered into the criminal record when they were made

⁹⁴ "A Miscegenation Mess," *Daily Picayune*, 15 December 1896. Thompson was charged as a "juvenile vagrant."

⁹⁵ "Both Willing," *Daily States*, 14 December 1896.

⁹⁶ *Plaçage* was a special form of concubinage characterized by a long-standing, formal relationship between a free woman of color and a white man of European origins. Joan M. Martin ("Plaçage and the Louisiana Gens de Couleur Libre: How Race and Sex Defined the Lifestyles of Free Women of Color," in *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color*, ed. Sybil Kein (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 57–70) went on to explain that that mulatto women were described by visitors to the Caribbean as "hauntingly beautiful."

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

visible. In this case, Thompson's mother, in her unwillingness to grant her approval, rendered the relationship visible.

Finally, press assessments of Thompson and Rogudo's relationship noted the difference between the legal and social reception of the liaison:

The only feature out of the ordinary in the matter is that this is probably the first case on record where the law prevented a marriage under such circumstances. The girl is in love with the Italian and he is also greatly attached to her. She declared that she wanted to live with him whether they were married or not, but her mother would not allow it.⁹⁸

From this, two main conclusions arise: according to legal definitions, a relationship between an Italian and a "negro" was in violation of official miscegenation statutes, even in 1890s Louisiana. Yet, and more importantly, most people did not seem to care, certainly not Thompson or Rogudo or the editors of the *Daily States*.⁹⁹ Instead, social convention diverged from legal edict and unofficial opinion diverged from official mandates.

Further evidence of this divergence persists in 1901 Birmingham, Alabama. As the *Birmingham Age Herald* reported, Henry Johnson, a "negro" ran away from Bessemer with Charlotte Mareno, a "white girl."¹⁰⁰ As the article continues, Mareno was revealed to be an "Italian girl," but, significantly, the article used "white" and "Italian" interchangeably. Initially, Johnson and Mareno gave different explanations

⁹⁸ "Both Willing," *Daily States*, 14 December 1896.

⁹⁹ As previously discussed, the vast majority of marriages that received an official marriage license were relationships between African American women and Italian men. Certainly, had the genders been reversed, meaning, had this been a relationship between an Italian girl and an African American man, it is likely that this relationship may not have received the same social sanction within the press.

¹⁰⁰ "Henry Johnson Turned Loose," *Birmingham Age Herald*, 24 January 1901; "A Negro in Luck," *Biloxi Daily Herald*, 27 January 1901.

for their “elopement.” Johnson explained that “the girl came after him and begged him to run away with her,” while Mareno said that she “came to Birmingham with the negro to meet a man she expected to marry, and in her disappointment at not finding him she decided to go to Nashville and enter a convent, taking the negro with her as an escort.”¹⁰¹ One would think that Johnson was released because both he and Mareno denied that their relationship had been “improper.”¹⁰² Regardless of which story was more accurate, it does not appear that Johnson and Mareno were actually in a relationship together, but, instead, were simply found travelling together. However, Johnson was still arrested and charged with larceny and miscegenation; it does not appear that Mareno was charged with miscegenation.

Ultimately, in the case against Johnson, the Grand Jury “fail[ed] to find a indictment.”¹⁰³ One accounting reported that the Grand Jury had ruled that Johnson had not in fact committed a crime.¹⁰⁴ However, a second explained that, “no prosecutors appeared and the negro was allowed to go his way.”¹⁰⁵ This difference seems particularly telling. Johnson may have been released because the infraction was not perceived as a serious-enough of a violation for a court trial. Johnson may have simply been released on a technicality, or Mareno’s “whiteness” may not have been in need of protecting in the same manner as “southern white womanhood.”

It is especially telling here where this case diverges from the circumstances of Thompson and Rogudo in Louisiana. While, as in Louisiana, a relationship between

¹⁰¹ Ibid. Strangely, Johnson changed his story after being released.

¹⁰² “A Negro in Luck,” *Biloxi Daily Herald*, 27 January 1901.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ “Henry Johnson Turned Loose,” *Birmingham Age Herald*, 24 January 1901.

¹⁰⁵ “A Negro in Luck,” *Biloxi Daily Herald*, 27 January 1901.

an Italian and a “negro” was legally defined as miscegenation, social convention in Alabama appears to read this particular relationship (whether or not it had been an actual relationship) as problematic. According to the *Herald*, Johnson did not even stop in the jail to dress when he found out that he had been released; instead, he talked with a reporter while he dressed outside the jail. This suggests that Johnson was aware that his relationship with Mareno, however innocuous, was read as objectionable, thus rendering his situation precarious and his own safety in jeopardy; as a result, he felt compelled to leave Alabama (and head to New Orleans) as quickly as possible. Mareno, “the pretty Bessemer Italian girl, daughter of M. Mareno, a merchant,” was perceived in both the Alabama and Mississippi press as legally and socially “white;” she fell under the category of “white” woman whose respectability warranted protection.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, the tone of the *Biloxi Daily Herald*, where they explain that the Grand Jury “failed” to find an indictment and that Johnson was “in luck” speaks to the fact that under different circumstances, Johnson would have most certainly been charged with violating the state’s miscegenation statute because of his relationship with a “white” Italian. In part evidence of the regionally disparate interpretations of interracial relationships in Louisiana and Alabama, this incident also offers further insight into the lack of social acceptability that such relationships garnered when they included an intimate liaison between an African American man and an Italian woman. Additionally, the contrasting treatment of Rogudo and

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Mareno's "interracial relationships" further reveals the liminal racial status of Italians within Gulf South marriage statutes.

Rollins v State

The most famous example of this liminal space and of how Sicilians and other Italians complicated Jim Crow miscegenation laws is found in *Rollins v State* from 1921 Alabama, yet three different versions of the case exist within the historiography on immigration and miscegenation. Much historiographical weight has been given to this singular case, which requires a detailed examination and revised analysis. The first and most common accounting of this case is found in the work of Matthew Frye Jacobson and Ariela Gross. Both Jacobson and Gross explain that Edith Labue, a Sicilian woman, was married to Jim Rollins, an African American man.¹⁰⁷ While Rollins and Labue were arrested and convicted of violating the state's miscegenation statute, Rollins's conviction was later overturned since the "state had never actually proved Labue's whiteness."¹⁰⁸ Jacobson and Gross draw entirely different conclusions from this same version of events. Jacobson famously explains that the *Rollins* case presents evidence of the "historical vicissitudes" of whiteness; he thus concludes that although the "court did not find that a Sicilian was necessarily nonwhite" it did find that "a Sicilian was inconclusively white."¹⁰⁹ Jacobson goes as

¹⁰⁷ Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford, England; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 55.

¹⁰⁸ Gross, *What Blood Won't Tell*, 230; Jacobson explains that Rollins's conviction was reversed "on the grounds that the state had produced 'no competent evidence to show that that the woman in question, Edith Labue, was a white woman,'" (*Whiteness of a Different Color*, 4).

¹⁰⁹ Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 4.

far as saying, “The court in *Rollins v State*...rul[ed] in essence that the Sicilian Edith Labue might have been just another Negro or something.”¹¹⁰ Gross, although utilizing the same evidence base as Jacobson, reaches an alternate conclusion. She claims that the trial did not actually discuss “whether Labue’s Sicilian identity made her white or not.”¹¹¹ She additionally claims that Rollins used Labue’s Sicilian identity as part of his defense: “Rollins simply argued that calling his wife ‘Sicilian’ did not *prove* she was white rather than ‘negro’...She might be any nationality and still be either white or not white.”¹¹² Yet, because neither author appears to have consulted the actual court transcripts, as I will subsequently demonstrate, their conclusions remain somewhat superficial; instead, they appear to use *Rollins v State* to illustrate their larger arguments, rather than analyzing the case for what it actually reveals about Italian racialization.

Frank Sweet proposes a second interpretation of *Rollins v State*, yet his version of the case remains riddled with inconsistencies.¹¹³ Sweet ultimately concludes that Rollins won his appeal because the “court apparently did not want to lock up an elderly couple who were respected members of their community.”¹¹⁴ Sweet’s accounting, including his explanation for why Rollins won his appeal,

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 62. Jacobson goes on to explain that Leo Frank’s lynching in 1915 was evidence of the fact that Frank “*contested whiteness*” and, “like Edith Labue...Leo Frank was *inconclusively white*” (Ibid., 64; emphasis his).

¹¹¹ Gross, *What Blood Won’t Tell*, 230 (emphasis hers).

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Frank W. Sweet, *Legal History of the Color Line: The Rise and Triumph of the One-Drop Rule* (Palm Coast, Fla.: Backintyme, 2000), 430. Sweet erroneously refers to Edith Labue as Edith Rollins, a name which never occurs in the appeals record or court transcript. He additionally describes Rollins as an “elderly African-looking business-man” while describing Edith as “a European-looking woman from Sicily,” descriptions that appear unverified by the court records except for a single reference in the appeals opinion to Rollins being an “aged-Negro.”

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

appears ground largely in conjecture and remains uncorroborated within the historical record.

The third version of the *Rollins v State* case emerges from the actual court transcripts of the trial; only Charles Robinson and Julie Novkov appear to have consulted these records.¹¹⁵ Using these transcripts, I turn now to this more comprehensive and more accurate reading of *Rollins v State*: Edith Labue was married to a Sicilian man named Joe Labue, who worked as a taxicab driver, a mechanic or a musician, depending on the record consulted.¹¹⁶ Joe Labue left Birmingham, Alabama on June 24, 1918, after being drafted into the army during WWI. He returned on January 27, 1919 to find his wife roughly six to seven months pregnant; Edith gave birth, according to her husband, “in April some time, 1919.”¹¹⁷ In the employ of Edith Labue’s father-in-law was “a negro or descendant of a negro” by the name of Jim Rollins; the Labues’ next door neighbor reported seeing Rollins bringing food to the family from time to time, at which point Rollins reportedly entered the Labue home on several occasions.

On February 11, 1921, Birmingham City Police “busted open the front door” of the Labue home; Detective B.F. Hubbard purportedly found Rollins and Edith Labue in a back room together: “They were in the kitchen, and it was dark. They were

¹¹⁵ Robinson, *Dangerous Liaisons*; Charles F Robinson, “What’s Sex Got to Do with It? Antimiscegenation Law and Southern White Rhetoric,” in *Manners and Southern History*, ed. Ted Ownby (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 97–113; Julie Novkov, *Racial Union Law, Intimacy, and the White State in Alabama, 1865-1954* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

¹¹⁶ According to the court transcript, Labue testified to being a taxicab driver and mechanic, although various census records list Labue as a musician and a member of an orchestra and band. Perhaps this was gendered coaching, since a “mechanic” may have been seen as more believable and trustworthy than a musician.

¹¹⁷ *Rollins v State*, Transcript (Court of Appeals of Alabama 1921).

standing in the back room right up face to face when we flashed the lights on ‘em.”¹¹⁸ Detective J. McGill confirmed this account: After the detectives had “kicked open the front door,” they discovered Rollins and Labue were both dressed and there was no bed in the room in which they were found, but “there was no light in the room...they were in the room alone...and it was dark.”¹¹⁹

As a result, on March 21, 1921, Rollins was indicted on the charge that he and Edith Labue, “a white person...did intermarry or live in adultery or fornication with each other, against the peace and dignity of the State of Alabama.”¹²⁰ At the ensuing trial, Birmingham City Detective H.H. Sullivan reported that Rollins had confessed while in custody:

He stated to me that in July or August of 1918 he had had intercourse with this woman Edith Labue; that about three weeks after this she called him to her home and told him there was something wrong, and wanted to know what to do about it, and he said he didn’t know what to do, and after the child was born he said she called him over there and showed him the child and asked him what he was going to do about it...He said he had had illicit intercourse with this woman. I talked to him about whether he had had intercourse with this woman on other occasions. He said he had. He said he had been about once a month; he said sometimes he would go two or three months...From July or August, 1918 up until the time that he was arrested and placed in custody.¹²¹

Despite Sullivan’s testimony, Rollins’s defense attorney claimed that his fellow Detective Hubbard had prompted the alleged confession by threatening and intimidating Rollins with a pistol. Given the line of questioning concerning when and

¹¹⁸ Ibid. Unfortunately, the court transcripts do not specify why the police arrived at the Labue home that evening; given how the trial played out, I would hypothesize that Joe Labue may have reported his suspicions regarding his wife to the police, thus leading to the commencement of their investigation.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. A second Birmingham City Detective, Mr. Patton, explained that no bed was in the room.

¹²⁰ *Rollins v State*, Transcript (Court of Appeals of Alabama 1921).

¹²¹ Ibid.

where Hubbard drew and brandished his weapon, there clearly remained a certain amount of discrepancy at the original trial regarding the veracity of Rollins's confession and the means by which it was elicited.

In addition to the problematic confession, two other key moments in the trial stand out: first, Francis Labue, Edith Labue's youngest child (allegedly fathered by Rollins while Joe Labue was away in the army), was brought into the court for the jury to inspect on three separate occasions. When asked to describe the "color" of the youngest child, Detective J. McGill testified, "It was a dark brown child, with kinky hair."¹²² Detective Hubbard confirmed this assessment, explaining that the third Labue child was a "dark brown skin child" who "had curly hair."¹²³ Notably, McGill described the other two Labue children as "white children." Francis may indeed have been phenotypically darker than his siblings, as the defense objected on each occasion that Francis was brought into the courtroom, claiming that the "exhibition" of the child would "prejudice the minds of the jury against the defendant."¹²⁴ Each objection, however, was overruled as the prosecution asked two detectives and Joe Labue to confirm Francis's identity in open court, thus displaying the two-year old for the jury and essentially reading the body of the child as evidence of the violated miscegenation statute.¹²⁵

Given the timing of his tenure in the army, it is technically possible that Joe Labue was in fact the birth father of Francis Labue; the 1920 Federal Census Records

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Of note, Francis's name was never mentioned in actual the court proceedings.

assumed as much, which additionally recorded Francis's color as "white," along with the rest of his family. Yet the question and discussion of "whiteness" remains the second peculiar moment of the trial. Despite Gross's claim to the contrary, the court did in fact engage in an evaluation of Edith Labue's racial and ethnic background.¹²⁶ Significantly, this testimony, largely given by Joe Labue, who notably testified as a witness for the prosecution, served to reaffirm Edith Labue's "whiteness" rather than discredit it.

Joe Labue began his testimony by explaining that he was Edith Labue's husband, that he (not we) married in Gadsden: "I don't remember the date. It was about ten or eleven years ago, something like that."¹²⁷ While Joe Labue claimed that he had lived with his wife continuously up until her arrest, the tone of his testimony contained a marked effort to distance himself from his wife. Joe Labue continued under cross-examination:

I came to this Country from Sicily. Sicily is in Southern Europe. I came from the Highlands of Sicily. It was not the mainland, but in an island...My wife came from Birmingham, I reckon. The first time I ever saw her was in Birmingham. I couldn't say whether she came from Sicily or not, but she did come from some foreign country. She came from Italy, from middle Italy. I have not studied Geography, but it is not over in Africa, across from Africa. I ain't seen it. I have never been across to Liberia.¹²⁸

It seems worth nothing that Joe Labue claims that his wife came from "middle Italy," while he came from Sicily; in both instances, he makes a marked effort to distance

¹²⁶ Gross had claimed that the trial did not actually discuss "whether Labue's Sicilian identity made her white or not" (*What Blood Won't Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America*, 230).

¹²⁷ *Rollins v State*, Transcript (Court of Appeals of Alabama 1921).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

Sicily and Italy from Africa. Detective J. McGill corroborated Joe Labue's assessment:

Yes, I have seen Edith Labue frequently, and she is a white woman. I do not know where she is from. She is an Italian I think. She is either an Italian or a Greek. I don't know which. I do not know whether she has any African blood in her veins or not, but she is not dark. She is of foreign decent [sic], and is an Italian or a Greek. I don't know whether she is right adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea or whether she is from Liberia or among those colored races down there or not. I am sorry to say I never had an opportunity to study Geography.¹²⁹

The testimony of these two witnesses is particularly telling: first, both Joe Labue and McGill make reference to the significance of geography, reaffirming that race was produced from a multiplicity of factors—in addition to phenotype and physical appearance, one's "color" was also prescribed based on one's geographic origins. By marking Edith Labue as foreign, possibly "Italian or Greek," but specifically not from somewhere "adjacent to the Mediterranean" or "over in Africa," both Joe Labue and McGill attempt to construct Edith Labue as unaffiliated with Africa, thus serving to reassert Edith Labue's whiteness. Second, Joe Labue also claims to be unsure of his wife's origins, even though both the 1910 and 1920 Federal Census recorded Edith's birthplace as Italy, a fact that Joe Labue would have self-reported since he and Edith were married and living together on both occasions. McGill testified that while he may not have personal knowledge of her blood, her skin was "not dark." The efforts of both Joe Labue and Detective McGill in this regard, especially in their roles as witnesses for the state, seem to be based in part on an attempt to verify Edith Labue's whiteness and thus reaffirm her (and Rollins's) violation of the miscegenation statute.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Likely in response to his wife's perceived infidelity, Joe Labue's testimony seems to be less of a sustained proclamation of Italian "whiteness," and more of an effort to fulfill a personal vendetta by providing the evidence necessary to convict his wife, and thus, Rollins by default.

At the conclusion of the trial, the court charged the jury with evaluating whether Rollins and Edith Labue had "liv[ed] together in a state of adultery or fornication."¹³⁰ In this manner, the court reminded them that Rollins "is not charged with being the father of that child that you saw brought in here and alleged to have been the child of this woman, Edith Labue."¹³¹ The court additionally specified: "Just one act of illicit sexual intercourse would not make a state of adultery or fornication unless there was an agreement to continue that relation. Just an occasional sexual intercourse would not make it a state of adultery or fornication."¹³² Despite these charges and the defense attorney's claim that Rollins's confession was coerced and involuntary, Rollins was found guilty on April 8, 1921 and sentenced to a minimum of six or maximum of seven years in the state penitentiary. Rollins filed a Notice of Appeal the following September on the grounds that "the evidence in this case [was] wholly circumstantial."¹³³

As a side note, Edith Labue was also convicted of miscegenation at a separate trial and sentenced to a term of two to five years on May 14, 1921. Labue spent the next six months in the Jefferson County Jail. While the exact motives and legal

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

proceedings remain unclear, a postscript in her arrest records explains that Edith Labue was “paroled from Jefferson County Jail into the custody of Mrs. W.D. Nesbitt” on November 22, 1921, at which point, Edith Labue disappears from the historical record.¹³⁴ In terms of Edith Labue’s relationship with her husband, there is no concrete evidence to support the fact that Edith and Joe Labue ever lived together again after Edith’s arrest and Joe’s court testimony.

Ultimately, the following January of 1922, after Edith Labue was paroled, an Alabama Appeals Court overturned Rollins’s conviction apparently on the grounds that Rollins’s confession had been inadmissible. The record demonstrated “without dispute” that Rollins’s confession had been “extorted” at gunpoint, which meant that the confession had been coerced “through fear and constraint superinduced by this means and no other.”¹³⁵ Without the confession, the court explained that the given evidence was “too vague and uncertain” to meet the burden of proof and that “corpus delicti” had not been proven, meaning the prosecution had not actually established that a crime had been committed.¹³⁶

Judge P. J. Bricken, who authored the opinion, explained that the lack of evidence resulted from two main factors: First, “No contention was made that these parties had ever intermarried, and the state relied for a conviction upon the averment

¹³⁴ Although I am unable to determine the reason Edith Labue was paroled or her relationship with Mrs. Nesbitt, it is worth noting that this was at least two months before Rollins was acquitted.

¹³⁵ *Rollins v State* (Court of Appeals of Alabama 1922). The Appeals Court ruled, ““It affirmatively appearing that the manner by which the so-called confessions of this defendant were obtained was in almost every particular repugnant to the rule governing such testimony, it was error of the most grievous nature to allow the state, over the objection of defendant, to prove same.”

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

that they lived together in adultery or fornication.”¹³⁷ Like the criminal court had originally charged the jury, a single occasion of “illicit sexual intercourse” did not actually violate the state’s miscegenation statute. Even if Rollins had in fact fathered the child of “suspicious appearance,” such a fact did not actually verify “a state of adultery or fornication.”¹³⁸ Proving that Edith Labue and Jim Rollins had engaged in more than the “occasional acts of adultery,” would have required evidence of “an agreement or understanding to continue” their illicit relationship, a fact that the prosecution had made no effort to contend.¹³⁹

Second, and the reason why this case has been so often discussed within the literature on Italian immigrants and within whiteness studies, Judge Bricken explained that there was “no material evidence” to prove that Edith Labue was in fact white:

There was no competent evidence to show that the woman in question, Edith Labue, was a white woman, or that she did not have negro blood in her veins and was not the descendant of a negro... The mere fact that the testimony showed this woman came from Sicily can in no sense be taken as conclusive that she was therefore a white woman, or that she was not a negro or a descendant of a negro.¹⁴⁰

According to Bricken, just because Edith Labue may have come from Sicily did not preclude her from having “negro blood in her veins.” Thus, in part because the prosecution had not affirmatively established the “whiteness” of Edith Labue, the court reversed and remanded the conviction of Jim Rollins for violating Alabama’s miscegenation statute.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Novkov, *Racial Union Law, Intimacy, and the White State in Alabama, 1865-1954*, 125.

¹³⁹ *Rollins v State* (Court of Appeals of Alabama 1922).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

Historians have reached varying conclusions on this point. Robinson suggests that this case illustrates the fact that “antimiscegenation laws rarely punished simple acts of interracial sex...[since] interracial cohabitation involved a ‘state or condition’ of sex that the parties intended to continue, not one random act.”¹⁴¹ On the other hand, Jacobson offers this case as evidence that Italians occupied a “middle ground in the racial order.”¹⁴² He also contends that the ruling “made clear that [Labue] was not the sort of white woman whose purity was to be ‘protected’ by that bulwark of white supremacy, the miscegenation statute.”¹⁴³ Similarly, Novkov explains that the case demonstrates “the extent to which Italians were not always reliably white even as late as 1921, when they still occupied a middle ground that was at that time being closed.”¹⁴⁴ Countering Jacobson and Novkov’s claims, Gross contends, “While *Rollins v Alabama* has been put forward as an example of a case litigating whether Italians were really white, all the case really demonstrates about Italian identity is that at least some Italians intermingled with blacks in early-twentieth-century Alabama.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Robinson, “What’s Sex Got to Do with It? Antimiscegenation Law and Southern White Rhetoric,” 103.

¹⁴² Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 62.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴⁴ Novkov, *Racial Union Law, Intimacy, and the White State in Alabama, 1865-1954*, 126. Although Novkov presents the most comprehensive summary of the case, Novkov’s still makes several unsubstantiated and incomplete conclusions. Novkov mentions that Edith Labue was never charged and apparently did not testify in Rollins’s case and that the jury was unable to evaluate “whether she presented herself as a white woman” (*Ibid.*, 128). While true that these particular court records do not reveal Edith Labue’s voice or testimony, the transcripts do refer to Edith Labue as Rollins’s codefendant. As noted above, Edith Labue was actually charged with violating Alabama’s miscegenation statute, yet a severance was filed, meaning that Edith Labue and Rollins were tried separately. According to the Alabama Convict Records, as previously mentioned, Edith Labue was ultimately convicted of miscegenation and sentenced to a term of two-five years on May 14, 1921.

¹⁴⁵ Gross, *What Blood Won’t Tell: A History of Race on Trial in America*, 2008, 231. In order to evaluate these conclusions, it is worth noting that without consulting the actual court transcripts, both Jacobson and Gross offer an incomplete version of *Rollins v State*. Their accountings fail to address the testimony of Joe Labue, Edith’s husband, nor do they take into account the reading of two-year Francis Labue as evidence of

What then, does this case ultimately expose? Does this reveal, as Jacobson and Novkov argue that “some Mediterranean people were of mixed race and could not be definitively identified as white without further investigation” or was evaluating Italian whiteness, as Gross contends, not actually relevant in this case?¹⁴⁶ While only a part of a much larger and more complicated story, Robinson’s claim remains especially compelling: in part, *Rollins v State* reveals that miscegenation laws were intended to prevent the legitimizing of interracial relationship, but “never to erect a bona fide sexual separateness between the races.”¹⁴⁷ Due to the tremendous emphasis in the court transcripts upon the fact that “occasional acts of adultery” did not constitute the crime that Rollins was charged with (“living or having lived in a state of adultery or fornication with Edith Labue”), it appears that the jury in fact erred in their conviction. On these grounds alone, with insufficient evidence to prove the given charge, the Appeals Court would have been forced to overturn the conviction. Besides Rollins’s coerced confession, witnesses at the original criminal trial were unable to verify the fact that Rollins and Edith Labue maintained an ongoing physical relationship. In fact, the prosecution’s only evidence that they had in fact engaged in adultery was Francis Labue, which the court apparently found to be insufficient

miscegenation. As a result, Gross does not provide a sustained discussion of the extent to which whiteness was indeed a central part of the judicial debate, just as Jacobson is unable to address the fact that witnesses appear to reaffirm, rather than challenge, Edith Labue’s whiteness. Additionally, from the appeals opinion, both Jacobson and Gross conclude that Labue was a Sicilian immigrant, when in fact the court testimony hypothesizes her place of origin as middle Italy. Without problematizing Labue’s actual place of origin, these accounts do not address the more nuanced hierarchy between Sicilians and Italians.

¹⁴⁶ Novkov, *Racial Union Law, Intimacy, and the White State in Alabama, 1865-1954*, 127.

¹⁴⁷ Robinson, “What’s Sex Got to Do with It? Antimiscegenation Law and Southern White Rhetoric,” 111.

evidence of an ongoing illicit relationship.¹⁴⁸ Given the prosecution's pointed display of Francis Labue for the jury, and the recognition by the defense that this maneuver was meant to prejudice the jury against the defendant, it can reasonably be assumed that Francis Labue displayed certain "non-Italian" physical characteristics. As a result of the prosecution's performance, it would appear that contemporaries did in fact read the alleged relationship between Jim Rollins and Edith Labue as an interracial relationship that violated the region's racial standards and norms but could not be legally legislated given the technicalities of Alabama's miscegenation law.

In terms of Italian (not to be subsumed with Sicilian) whiteness, this case serves to substantiate Italian whiteness. As previously noted, Joe Labue seemed oddly unable to comment on his wife's place of origin; maybe she was foreign, but he met her in Birmingham. In this regard, his imprecision, his ambiguity and his tone could be read as intentional, an effort intended to ensure Rollins's (and Edith's) conviction. In order for Rollins to be convicted of miscegenation, Edith needed to be seen as "white." As a result, Joe Labue's testimony, does just that—constructing his wife as from "middle Italy," specifically not Sicilian, and definitely not from or "across from" Africa, substantiates and attests to his wife's Italian-ness and whiteness and reveals several additional conclusions. First, this shows that Italian and Sicilian whiteness and respectability appear to be socially, if not legally, understood

¹⁴⁸ Significantly, later that same year, the Alabama Appeals Court confirmed in *Lewis v State* that a child was sufficient evidence to prove miscegenation. Hint Lewis, a white man, and Bess Adams, a black woman, were convicted of "felonious fornication." The court ultimately ruled that the existence of the child was sufficient to sustain a conviction for felonious fornication. It was not necessary for someone to have witnessed the parties engaged in sexual intercourse (No. 4 Div. 723, 18 Ala. App. 263; 89 So. 904 (Court of Appeals of Alabama 1921)).

differently in this particular instance. In fact, identifying himself as Sicilian, while his wife as “middle” Italian reconfirms the “racial transiency” of Sicilians in the Gulf South. Sicilians resided somewhere in the middle—“white” enough to unproblematically marry other “white” Italians but racially ambiguous enough whereby their relationship with an African American did not automatically prove miscegenation, thus the need to reassert Edith’s whiteness by way of her place of origin.

Second, as discussed in the previous chapters on lynching and disenfranchisement, Joe Labue’s testimony reveals his awareness of the available anti-Sicilian discourse in the Gulf South and the existing hierarchical ranking of Italians over Sicilians whereby Sicilian “whiteness” was in fact socially and unofficially suspect. Were this not the case, Joe Labue would not have needed to present evidence of his own reliability and legitimacy as a citizen. Instead, Joe Labue endeavors to overcome his own Sicilian-ness and challenge the existing negative rhetoric regarding Sicilians by explaining that he came to the United States when he was twelve, did not “remember anything that happened” there, and was now an American citizen.¹⁴⁹ By explaining that he has “never seen the people of Southern Italy or Sicily,” an effort meant to distance himself (and by default his wife) from their perceived Sicilian-ness and attendant stereotypes, he works to construct himself as a dishonored “white,” southern man. Similarly, identifying Edith Labue as Sicilian would have at least raised questions about whether her relationship with Rollins could

¹⁴⁹ *Rollins v State*, Transcript (Court of Appeals of Alabama 1921).

in fact be interpreted and legislated as miscegenation, which meant that Sicilians were “inbetween” enough to present reasonable doubt. In this sense, Joe Labue offers testimony to engender his own citizenship (interpreted here as both trustworthiness and masculinity), as well as proving his wife’s whiteness as a means to justify Rollins’s conviction. Furthermore, the court’s efforts to classify Edith Labue as “middle” Italian or even Greek (as another witness hypothesized), served to remove her “racial transiency” and mark her as unequivocally and legally “white.” In this regard, by 1921, Alabama courts readily prescribed to the imported dichotomy that hierarchically ranked northern over southern Italians and both over Sicilians.¹⁵⁰

What of the court’s specific reference to the fact that just because Edith Labue came from Sicily was not “conclusive” evidence that she was a “white woman, or that she was not a negro or a descendant of a negro”? Although a provocative and quotable turn-of-phrase, based on the additional transcript evidence, the judicial rhetoric here serves as merely illustrative of the court’s conclusion that the state did not actually prove that a crime had been committed. While acknowledging the existing racial questionability of Sicilian whiteness and while Edith Labue’s whiteness was certainly part of the conversation, it was not the grounds for which Rollins’s conviction was overturned. Additionally, Edith Labue was apparently “white” enough to be convicted of miscegenation for her relationship with Jim

¹⁵⁰ Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women’s Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Of note, considering references that marked Edith Labue as possibly Greek, it appears that Greeks were ranked alongside southern Italians within the European hierarchy, somewhere below northern Italians but arguably above Sicilians. Jacobson, for example, includes Greeks alongside his discussion of whether “Jews/Italians/Greeks/Portuguese/Letts” were “white.” Jacobson concludes in the affirmative but notes that their whiteness was “contingent” (*Whiteness of a Different Color*, 272).

Rollins on her own accord.¹⁵¹ In the end, the Alabama Appeals Court overturned Rollins's conviction because of a technicality: the prosecution had not actually proved that Edith Labue and Jim Rollins had broken Alabama's miscegenation statute, which required evidence that a couple had either intermarried or engaged in multiple acts of "illicit intercourse." Despite the "kinky hair" and "dark" skin of two-year old Francis Labue, without Rollins's coerced confession, the prosecution had not provided enough evidence to establish a pattern or ongoing intimate relationship. While this case certainly reveals both evidence of the larger patterns regarding the intentionality of miscegenation statutes as well as the unique particularities of official and unofficial racing of Sicilians and other Italians, despite historiographical readings to the contrary, Rollins's successful appeal was not ultimately grounded in a determination of Edith Labue as being inconclusively or questionably white.

Miscegenation in the Courts

An additional reason to counter the claim that Edith Labue's race was ever in question is the fact that the *Rollins* court discussed Labue's race in a manner inconsistent with the way race was commonly evaluated when determining miscegenation violators within judicial disputes in the Gulf South in the 1920s. For example, in *Wilson v State*, the question before the Court of Appeals of Alabama in 1924 was whether Sarah Wilson, "a negro or a descendant of a negro" and Charles Medicus, "a white person," had in fact "live[d] together in a state of felonious

¹⁵¹ That being said, Edith Labue was paroled about two months before Rollins's conviction was remanded and overturned.

adultery.”¹⁵² The Appeals Court was additionally charged with determining, “Was this defendant a negro or a descendent of a negro?”¹⁵³ To a large degree, the prosecution’s evidence was based on witness testimony that defined Wilson as a “negro” by association. One witness testified that he knew Wilson was “negro” because he had seen her with a “negro woman named Ruby... This woman here (defendant) kissed Ruby good-bye. Ruby was a negro mighty near black.”¹⁵⁴ The defense counsel asked, “How do you know she has a great amount of negro blood in her?” to which the witness responded, “By her color and associates.”¹⁵⁵ Similarly, Mrs. Charles Medicus testified that Wilson “lived in a negro house with negro people.” Under cross-examination, Mrs. Medicus explained, “You can tell by her looks she is a negro.” The defense counsel went on to ask her, “Do you know whether or not her father or mother have any negro at all in them, of your own knowledge?” Mrs. Medicus responded, “Why certainly, by looking at her. I do not know who they are. I could not swear how that is, by looking at her, I know.”¹⁵⁶

Both the line of questioning and the witness testimony are especially revealing. In asking whether the witnesses had personal knowledge of Wilson’s mother and father, the defense counsel insisted on the witnesses being able to account for Wilson’s blood quantum. Yet, even without this knowledge, Mrs. Medicus contended that Wilson’s race was still knowable by sense and sight. As the jilted wife, Mrs. Medicus would have had a vested interest in confirming Wilson’s race as

¹⁵² *Wilson v State*, No. 1 Div. 527, 20 Ala. App. 137; 101 So. 417 (Court of Appeals of Alabama 1924).

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

“negro” and thus ensuring her conviction, yet other witnesses corroborated her reading and determination of Wilson. The first witness admits that although he did not know Wilson’s parentage, he insisted that he could tell Wilson’s race by those with whom she associated.

The state ultimately sided with the prosecution’s witness testimony:

We think that, if for no other reason, the rule born of necessity should and does permit a witness, if he knows such to be the fact, to testify that a person is a negro, or is a white person, or that he is a man, or that she is a woman; for courts are not supposed to be ignorant of what everybody else is presumed to know, and in this jurisdiction certainly every person possessed of any degree of intelligence knows a negro, and also that the term negro, and colored person, are used interchangeably and mean the same thing.¹⁵⁷

Especially telling is the fact that the court reasoned that anyone with “any degree of intelligence knows a negro.”¹⁵⁸ Thus, association, parentage and “common knowledge” remained the primary means of evaluating one’s race. Of particular note, Edith Labue’s associations were never called into question nor was her blood quantum part of the debate in the *Rollins* case.

Instead, the same assumption of “whiteness” remains present in *Jackson v State*, an Alabama appeals case from 1930. Sam Jackson, “a negro or a descendant of a negro” and a Greek woman named Alexander Markos, “alleged to be a white person,” were both indicted and convicted. Upon appeal, however, their conviction was reversed and remanded. One might conclude that this presents evidence of the inconclusiveness of Markos’s whiteness, that she was only “allegedly” a white

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Additionally, in contrast with Louisiana’s 1910 ruling in *State v Treadaway*, Alabama courts by the 1920s had concluded that the terms “negro” and “colored” were interchangeable.

person. However, upon further reading and like the *Rollins* ruling, this appears to be little more than a turn-of-phrase, since the question of whether Markos was a “white woman” never entered the court’s debate. Instead, the court overturned the conviction on the ground that the crime did not meet the burden of proof of miscegenation. The court explained that miscegenation was defined as a “mixture of races in marriage or living together in state of adultery or fornication, by white person and negro, or descendent of negro.”¹⁵⁹ The question before the court was not whether or not Markos was “white” but whether the interaction between Markos and Jackson was definitionally miscegenation. In this regard, the court presumes Markos to be “white” but because both parties testified that their relationship consisted of a “single act of intercourse,” the court concluded that such an occurrence did not establish the crime of miscegenation. Markos admits that she had “sexual intercourse with him one time only...I just happened to meet him on the street. When I went up to him I said nothing...I stayed in there about ten minutes. This is the first time I ever had anything to do with him, and when I got through I went my way and he went his, and since that time I have not seen him or spoken to him.”¹⁶⁰ While this could very easily be a defense tactic and does not necessarily preclude the fact that Markos and Jackson may have indeed had an ongoing relationship, the court’s discussion and conclusion remain significant. Unlike Sarah Wilson discussed above, Markos’s associations were neither evaluated or questioned; even given her admittance of sexual partners, Markos remained unequivocally white. Thus, very much in line with the conclusion in *Rollins*

¹⁵⁹ *Jackson v State*, No. 6 Div. 769, 23 Ala. App. 555; 129 So. 306 (Court of Appeals of Alabama 1930).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

v State, like Edith Labue, Markos's "whiteness" was never actually in question nor was it the reason for the overturned miscegenation conviction; rather in both cases, the court overturned the miscegenation convictions on the grounds that the interactions in question were isolated affairs, not an ongoing relationships, and thus not in violation of Alabama's miscegenation statute.

Personal and common knowledge, however, was still certainly part of the witness testimony in both the *Rollins* case and the *Wilson* case, thus suggesting the employment of unofficial actors in constructing and contributing to "informal citizenship." More explicitly, the *Wilson* case suggests a growing support for the notion that common or popular evaluations of race, over that of scientific understandings, were beginning to possess greater legal resonance. The Supreme Court had reached a similar conclusion in 1923 in *Thind v United States* where Bhagat Singh Thind, as a "high caste Hindu of full Indian blood," had petitioned the court for his right to naturalize based on his Caucasian ancestry. Despite the 1790 Naturalization Law that granted the right of naturalization to "free white persons" and a recognition that the terms "white" and Caucasian were synonymous, the court concluded, "'Free white persons' are words of common speech, to be interpreted in accordance with the understanding of the common man, synonymous with the word 'Caucasian' only as the word is popularly understood."¹⁶¹ Consequently, Thind was denied the right to naturalize on the grounds that he phenotypically diverged from the

¹⁶¹ *U.S. v Bhagat Singh Thind*, No. 202, 261 U.S. 204, 205 (United States Supreme Court, 1923).

“common man’s” definition of whiteness.¹⁶² Thus “public imagination,” “common knowledge,” and a concept of race as determined by the “average man” were all becoming legally admissible.¹⁶³

In this regard and thus reaffirming the role of “informal citizenship,” the *Wilson* case offers evidence of patterns consistent with other miscegenation disputes through the 1920s as miscegenation debates centered on personal evaluations of race based on association.¹⁶⁴ For example, in a provocative appeal of a miscegenation conviction in *Weaver et al v State* (AL, 1928), the court explained that according to Alabama law, “Man's race, in prosecution for miscegenation, may be proved by admissions, verbally or by voluntary social intercourse with negroes.”¹⁶⁵ According to the court’s interpretation of the state’s civil code, “associating with negroes” meant “attending negro churches, sending children to negro schools, and otherwise voluntarily living on terms of social equality with them.”¹⁶⁶ The court upheld Jim Dud Weaver’s miscegenation conviction in part because of his racial “admission” by association, as well as the fact that his grandfather had “kinky hair...one of [the] determining characteristics of negro.”¹⁶⁷ Not only was such a familial and phenotypic

¹⁶² Ibid. The court explained, “The physical group characteristics of the Hindus render them readily distinguishable from the various groups of persons in this country commonly recognized as white” (Ibid.).

¹⁶³ Ian Haney-López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

¹⁶⁴ Similarly in *Tyson et al. v Raines* (No. 27126, 165 La. 625; 115 So. 803 (Supreme Court of Louisiana 1928)), an inheritance dispute devolved into an evaluation about whether the defendant’s father was in fact a “white man” even though his mother was a “free woman of color.” Such a union, prohibited by Louisiana law at the time, would have rendered the defendant an illegitimate heir because of the illegal marriage. The testimony regarding the defendant’s father was ground in an evaluation of association—according to the court, someone was “white or black” as determined by association and action (not necessarily appearance).

¹⁶⁵ *Weaver et al. v State*, No. 1 Div. 756, 757, 22 Ala. App. 469; 116 So. 893 (Court of Appeals of Alabama 1928).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

link “properly admitted,” but the court continued in confirming the legal resonance of reading bodies for the purposes of determining race.¹⁶⁸

As the *Weaver* court further concluded, “The human family is divided into five distinct types or races...the types under consideration here are the Negro and Caucasian (or white).”¹⁶⁹ Not only does this case present further evidence of unofficial citizenship at work, whereby “unofficial” actors maintained the prerogative for determining race based on observations of association, but this ruling persists in revealing the pattern of placing Italians in a liminal racial space with regards to technicalities of the identified racial categories within miscegenation statutes. Again, neither “Negro” nor “Caucasian,” this liminal racial space explains why Italians were sometimes criminalized and sometimes not when intimately involved with African Americans in the early-twentieth century Gulf South.

Even though Italians may have been legally white, they were not conclusively white when it came to the regulation of their marriages, especially in the 1890s. Ultimately, whether or not Italians possessed “marriage whiteness” became a question of regionality and temporality. In certain historical moments, certainly before the turn-of-the-century, Italians occupied a liminal racial place whereby their racial transiency bureaucratically permitted them to marry both persons of color as well as other “white” Europeans. While Italian whiteness and their rights of “informal

¹⁶⁸ The court went on to provide a definition of “negro” in 1928 Alabama: “a descendant of the whole blood from the black woolly-headed race of South Africa and his and her descendants, to and including the third generation, where one parent of each generation is a white person.”

¹⁶⁹ *Weaver et al. v State* (Court of Appeals of Alabama 1928).

citizenship” were certainly debated, occasionally denied and at times inconsistently assessed and applied during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, the aforementioned review and analysis of Orleans Parish marriage records demonstrates the fact that over time, Italian whiteness was becoming less transient and less subjective as Italians readily acquired more definitive access to whiteness.

By the 1920s, *Rollins v State*, in contrast to the existing historiographical conclusions, demonstrates that miscegenation cases involving Italians reaffirmed, rather than challenged, their whiteness. Rollins successful appeal was not ground in a determination of Edith Labue as being inconclusively or questionably white. In fact, quite the opposite. The pointed testimony that noted the “kinky hair” and “dark” skin of two-year old Francis and declared Edith was from “middle Italy” and definitely not from or “across from” Africa, attested to her Italian-ness and, by the logic of the court, her whiteness. Thus removing her “racial transiency,” in the particular context of 1920s Alabama, she was marked as legally “white.” Taken altogether, these various miscegenation incidents reveal the liminal racial status and racial transiency of Italians in the Jim Crow Gulf South.

Epilogue
**Citizenship, Naturalization and Immigration Legislation in the
Gulf South to 1924**

Most immediately visible in the post-1891 lynching climate, the Gulf South press began to adopt a more virulent rhetoric against Italians and Italian immigration.¹ In justification of the 1899 lynchings in Tallulah, for example, the *Daily States* now described Italians as “a colony of vicious murderers and assassins [to whom] murder and blood were...what roses, moonlight and music are to poets and lovers.”² According to these reports, the lynch mob “looked on [the Italians as] degenerates as monsters, capable of any infamy and they determined to destroy them root and branch, just as the traveler places his armed heel upon the head of the viper.”³

Even while Italians remained in a liminal racial place within southern miscegenation laws and even while Louisiana legislators protected “dago” voting rights, legislators in the Gulf South began to propose significant restrictions to Italian immigration. After the 1891 lynching, certain press accounts read the Italian-led anti-lynching protests around the country as having provided the nation with a more accurate and illuminating portrait of the Italian’s true colors:

The war-like mouthing of the Italian colonists in their respective cities... has opened the eyes of the press of the whole country to the fact that they make poor citizens, and the result is a general demand that legislation shall be enacted at the next session of Congress to

¹ Recall, immigration debates in Louisiana before the lynching noted that the worst type of immigrants were criminals, and that existing legislation did little to prevent their arrival. While such discussions did specifically mention that proposed legislation was “intended to prevent colonization by the Mormons,” criminals and Italians were not yet understood as synonymous categories (“Regulating Immigration,” *Daily Picayune*, 16 December 1890). In the aftermath of the 1891 lynching, immigration discourse in Louisiana, for example, collapsed this understanding of Italians with criminal and undesirable.

² *Daily States*, 27 July 1899.

³ *Daily States*, 24 July 1899.

restrict if not to exclude altogether immigration from Sicily from which country the Mafia has been transplanted to our soil.⁴

In New Orleans, the Committee of Fifty recommended a similar ban when they suggested that “immigration from Lower Italy and Sicily should be entirely prohibited” but that such a proposal was impracticable, because blatantly racial legislation like the Chinese Exclusion Act had already “discredited the nation.”⁵ The *Daily Picayune* fervently agreed and suggested that Congress should “exclude absolutely from ingress into the Union all Sicilians and immigrants from Southern Italy...nothing else will cope with this overshadowing evil.”⁶ The report of the Grand Jury in Louisiana charged with investigating the lynching and alleged jury tampering took a more measured approach, though they still proclaimed that Louisiana and the United States could no longer be the dumping ground for the “worthless and depraved.”⁷ To resolve the crisis at hand, the Grand Jury demanded that Italians “assimilate in thought and deed with our own people.”⁸ As of 1896, immigration restrictions were considered insufficient, because they “welcome[d]” the “worst sorts of foreign criminals...Most of the those [Italians] who come here are very ignorant and extremely poor, and they have brought with them their secret criminal societies,

⁴ “The Press is With Us,” *Daily States*, 20 March 1891.

⁵ “Italy and the United States,” *New York Times*, 16 May 1891.

⁶ “Report of the Citizens Committee,” *Daily Picayune*, 15 May 1891. This position represents a complete reversal from the *Daily Picayune*’s earlier encouragement of Italian immigration. This anti-immigrant perspective ebbed and flowed throughout the decade, as I will go on demonstrate, especially with regards to the *Picayune*’s 1897 reporting and editorializing.

⁷ Tom Smith, *The Crescent City Lynchings: The Murder of Chief Hennessy, the New Orleans “Mafia” Trials, and the Parish Prison Mob* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2007), 265.

⁸ “The Lynchers Justified: Report of the Grand Jury of New Orleans,” *New York Times*, 6 May 1891. Beyond restricting immigration, some opinions suggested that the ease with which Italians were able to become citizens should be reconsidered: “Foreigners should not be surprised to see obstacles place in the way of granting American citizenship in the face of such unpatriotic conduct as has been witnessed since the New Orleans lynching episode” (“They Are Not Good Citizens,” *New York Times*, 23 March 1891).

such as the Mafia, which no power, not even life in a free country, seems to be able to blot out from among these people.”⁹ Even though Louisianans in previous decades had differentiated between the Italians and the criminals within the community, this new discourse conflated Italian with criminality and began to classify these delinquent tendencies, violence and unassimilability, as inherited characteristics of the Italian people.

Throughout the 1890s, the lynchings of Italians were explained not only as a necessary form of justice against a fundamentally violent people, but were also increasingly conceived in terms of citizenship rights.¹⁰ Within the context of explaining the reasons behind the 1891 lynching, the *Ruston Callgraph* suggested, “The government must be directed by Americans and those seeking our hospitality must assume a minor role.”¹¹ The *Weekly Messenger* explained that the lynching had been necessary to show the Italians that “America belongs to Americans and should be ruled by Americans... American born are those who are entitled to run this country.”¹² The *Daily Picayune* went on to identify Italians as the most undesirable

⁹ “Foreign Immigration,” *Daily Picayune*, 9 November 1896.

¹⁰ Beyond the lynching, the *Daily Picayune* identified the “epidemic of slaughter among these people,” as evidence that the Italians and Sicilians were “entirely unfit to become citizens of a country whose political system they do not understand and with which they have no sympathy” (“Outbreak of the Mafia,” *Daily Picayune*, 24 July 1895).

¹¹ “Expressions of the Louisiana Press on the New Orleans Lynching: Popular Justice,” *Daily Picayune*, 1 April 1891; the *Ruston Callgraph* was a local publication out of Lincoln Parish in northern Louisiana. Furthermore, they suggested that pathways to citizenship should be made more difficult in order to stop the influx of crime and criminals, since the “slums of Europe have been emptied upon our shores...[and] European nations dump their convicts and cutthroats [here].”

¹² *Weekly Messenger*, 21 March 1891. (St. Martinsville, Louisiana) According to the *Daily Picayune*, the murders of native-born Louisianans “aroused the indignation and desire for self-protection of the Americans to the extent of taking a bloody vengeance” (“Lynching of Sicilians at Tallulah,” 22 July 1899).

immigrant group, because they “do not embrace citizenship.”¹³ Italians were no longer “the right sort of immigration,” and they had a “demoralizing influence on the general population.”¹⁴ This discourse represents the inverse claims of those made by Louisianans in previous decades. Instead of encouraging immigration, and considering immigrants linked to the state’s future prosperity, Louisianans now considered Italians a problematic and unassimilable immigrant group. Though this discursive shift was motivated by regional politics, Louisianans began to replicate the ongoing national, albeit northern, discourse.

Just as Louisianans adopted certain national norms, this same discourse began to use Louisiana politics to advocate for nationwide immigration policies. Henry Cabot Lodge, a Republican Senator from Massachusetts and active member of the Immigration Restriction League, referenced the 1891 New Orleans lynching in several speeches he made in favor of immigration restriction and literacy tests in the 1890s. In an 1896 speech quoted in the *New York Times*, Lodge cautioned that these “other races of totally different race origin, with whom the English-speaking people have never hitherto been assimilated or brought in contact...[represented] great and perilous change in the very fabric of our race.” Furthermore, he suggested that these

¹³ “To Restrict Foreign Immigration,” 5 March 1895. This was in contrast to immigrants “from the British Isles, Germany and Scandinavia...Those people readily took to the ways of the country and became citizens.” Louisiana and national rhetoric progressively aligned. Not only was the Grand Jury report and proposal to ban Sicilian immigration printed in the *New York Times*, but national discourse also suggested that immigration should be regulated to exclude those “who are not likely to make useful and independent citizens.” Similar opinions spoke to the undesirability of Italian immigration and the fact that “the immigration from Italy is very largely...almost altogether of a kind we are better without” (“Editorial,” *New York Times*, 26 April 1891; “Sifting Immigration,” *New York Times*, 27 April 1891; “Restricting Immigration,” *New York Times*, 6 March 1892).

¹⁴ *Daily Picayune*, 4 December 1897.

groups were a national peril that endangered “the quality of our race and citizenship through the wholesale infusion of races.”¹⁵

Although Lodge ostensibly claimed that criminality was not inherited, in an 1891 article entitled “Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration,” he went on to suggest that the lynching in New Orleans resulted from unrestricted immigration: “If we permit the classes which furnish material for these societies to come freely to this country, we shall have these outrages to deal with, and such scenes as that of the 14 of March will be repeated.”¹⁶ Lodge characterized the Italians as “temporary migrants,” of the “pauper and criminal class”, who were unable to read and write. He suggested that the lynching was an “unfortunate” but unsurprising outcome, given this class of immigrants in New Orleans. To avoid such violence in the future, Lodge argued that the time had come for an “intelligent restriction...that of ability to read and write...If we do not act, and act intelligently, we must be prepared for just such events as that of New Orleans.”¹⁷ According to Lodge, Congress should require immigrants to pass a literacy test, in order to prevent undesirable immigrants from entering the United States. This prohibition would avert the conditions that resulted in lynchings, since it was the class of immigrants, not New Orleanians, who were to

¹⁵ “Must Guard Our Gates: The Necessity of Restricting Immigration to Our Shores,” *New York Times*, 17 March 1896.

¹⁶ By “material,” Lodge meant dangerous or criminal elements (Henry Cabot Lodge, “Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration,” *North American Review* 152, no. 414 (May 1891): 605). The Immigration Restriction League made a similar claim when they advocated for increased immigration restrictions in order to avoid “dangerous occurrences” like “the Mafia incident in New Orleans,” by which they meant the presence of the Mafia element that led to the 1891 lynching (Immigration Restriction League. “Immigration Restriction League Outlines the ‘Immigration Problem,’” 1894. In *Major Problems in American Immigration and Ethnic History*, edited by Jon Gjerde, 310. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

¹⁷ Lodge, “Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration,” 612.

blame for the violence. In so arguing, regional politics were used as fodder for national claims.¹⁸

Louisiana's regional climate was still more complicated by racial politics, economic needs and Jim Crow mandates. Certain opinions in the Louisiana press, in line with national discourse, advocated in favor of the literacy requirement: "The country cannot successfully assimilate a population of this character. These illiterates are incapable of understanding our constitution and free institutions and cannot fail to lower the general moral status of the communities in which they settle."¹⁹ According to the *Daily Picayune*, illiterate immigrants could not be made into "good Americans," therefore, their immigration should be restricted.

However, despite the shift towards a more virulent anti-Italian discourse in the press after the 1891 lynching, when the literacy bill finally passed Congress in 1897 with only a three-vote majority, both Louisiana senators voted against it.²⁰ As the *Daily Picayune* reported, Senator Caffery identified those Italians from the "agricultural sections" as "industrious citizens," although he did acknowledge that the Sicilians were "less desirable."²¹ Senator Blanchard was quoted as saying, "[The literacy test] might do in the populous cities, but not in the scantily settled localities

¹⁸ The Immigration Restriction League, having developed out of Massachusetts, was a northern organization. Yet, because the League, with Lodge as their spokesman, advocated national immigration restrictions, their agenda has been misread as representing the needs of the nation, when in fact they advocated from a specifically northern perspective. Despite moments when the Louisiana discourse aligned with the northern or national discourse, regional factors still contradicted this northern agenda.

¹⁹ This opinion explained that literacy requirements would limit Italian immigration, which was necessary because "good American citizens can never be made out of such material and it is easy to see by the high percentage of illiteracy among immigrants of certain nationalities that the defect of illiteracy is a more important disqualification than the other defects already provided" ("Illiteracy Among Immigrants," *Daily Picayune*, 4 May 1896).

²⁰ "Immigration Bill Finally Passed," *Daily Picayune*, 18 February 1897. Although passed in Congress in 1897, Cleveland went on to veto the bill.

²¹ *Ibid.*

of the south and west, where immigration was needed.”²² These were not just anomalous voting patterns in Louisiana, as congressional votes on the literacy test throughout the South were rather split: twelve southern senators voted in favor, five opposed; in the House, forty southerners approved, while twenty-five opposed.²³ This represents a clear example of the contradictions between regional immigration agendas and signals that immigrant labor was still in high demand in the South in the 1890s. The literacy requirement, Lodge and the Immigration Restriction League’s campaign focal point, may have been a plausible solution for the overcrowded urban North. Yet, in 1897, such a constraint would have impeded the economic needs of southern planters, which still required a great influx of immigrant labor. Not only did this economic regional motivation contradict the national discourse, but it also paradoxically conflicted with the local politics of race.

Yet, through the following decade, southern congressmen steadily shifted away from their economically motivated support of unrestricted immigration. By 1904, South Carolina’s legislature instructed its immigration bureau to only make appeals to “white citizens of the United States, citizens of Ireland, Scotland, Switzerland, France and other foreigners of Saxon origin.”²⁴ North Carolina, Alabama and Kentucky issued similar directives, citing preference for immigrants of “Teutonic, Celtic or Saxon origin” or persons from “English-speaking and Germanic

²² “Immigration Bill Finally Passed,” *Daily Picayune*, 18 February 1897; “Illiteracy Among Immigrants,” *Daily Picayune*, 4 May 1896.

²³ Rowland T. Berthoff, “Southern Attitudes Toward Immigration, 1865-1914,” *The Journal of Southern History* 17, no. 3 (August 1, 1951): 360.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 349.

countries;” only in “desperation” would they hire Italians.²⁵ One labor recruiter from Alabama proclaimed in 1905, “For God’s sake, send your Italians to the coal mines of Pennsylvania or some other hot place. We are not in sympathy with the padrone or mafia system.”²⁶ In 1910, Senator Leroy Percy of Mississippi and Representative Burnett of Alabama signed the majority report of the Immigration Commission that recommended the literacy test.²⁷ Having been defeated by a presidential veto in 1897, when the literacy test came up for debate in Congress again in 1913, the proposal received limited southern opposition; only two southern senators dissented and the southern representatives in the House voted to support the bill sixty-eight to five.²⁸

World War I temporarily changed the terms of immigration debates in both the Gulf South and at the national level. Wartime revealed a peculiar phenomenon, whereby both native-born U.S. citizens (of foreign ancestry) and naturalized U.S. citizens found that they could be compelled to perform military service for their native country.²⁹ For example, Father Carra, a New Orleans priest and American citizen who came to the U.S. at the age of eight, was seized while on a visit to Palermo and drafted into military service.³⁰ According to Italian law, “naturalization of an Italian subject as a citizen of another country does not relieve him from the

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *Manufacturers Record*, XLVIII (1905), 5-13, quoted in Ibid.

²⁷ Berthoff, “Southern Attitudes Toward Immigration, 1865-1914,” 360.

²⁸ Ibid. Although the bill passed both houses of Congress, it was again defeated by presidential veto; this pattern repeated again in 1915.

²⁹ “Father R. Carra May Be Soldier in Italy’s Army,” *Times-Picayune*, 22 September 1914; “American Citizens Forced into Army,” *Times-Picayune*, 15 October 1914; “Naturalization Does Not Protect,” *Times-Picayune*, 5 June 1915.

³⁰ “American Citizens Forced into Army,” *Times-Picayune*, 15 October 1914.

liability of the performance of military service in Italy.”³¹ Because the U.S. did not have a naturalization treaty with Italy, the Italian government maintained that if a citizen left the “fatherland” without having performed military service, he and his male children would still be subject to compulsory military duty.³² Policies began to shift by 1915, as the Italian government made moves to “disclaim” children born to Italian parents in the U.S.³³

In part because of this ambiguity, some Americans began to encourage the naturalization of foreign citizens as a wartime measure.³⁴ Local organizations published guidebooks and textbooks instructing “aliens” on how to achieve citizenship, just as local papers printed daily notices of those foreigners who had taken out naturalization papers.³⁵ Southern journalist Frederic J. Haskin explained that, “In times of war, when loyalty is an absolute necessity, a large population of foreigners, ignorant of and indifferent to American traditions, constitutes... a menace. They form too fertile a ground for the enemy’s propaganda.”³⁶ He noted that “aliens” were not “deliberately disloyal,” but that their illiteracy and ignorance meant that they

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Italy Disclaims Children Born Here,” *Times-Picayune*, 24 August 1915. Of note, by 1929, Italy formalized their policy that “Italo-American citizens may visit their native country without fear of conscription for military service, so long as that country is at peace” (“Italo-American Will Not Be Conscripted While Visiting in Italy During Peace Time,” *State Times Advocate*, 5 November 1929 (Baton Rouge, LA)). Yet, the Fascist government made clear that they were “in no way relinquishing what it considers its claim upon its emigrating citizens” (Ibid.).

³⁴ “Foreign Born Told the Advantages of Citizenship,” *Times-Picayune*, 12 October 1917; Frederic J. Haskin, “The Alien Again,” *Times-Picayune*, 14 January 1918.

³⁵ “Guide Designed to Pave Way for Aliens Desiring Citizenship,” *Times-Picayune*, 3 July 1916; “Italian, German Take Papers for Naturalization,” *State Times Advocate*, 26 March 1917 (Baton Rouge, LA); “19 Naturalized in U.S. Court Monday Session,” *Miami Herald*, 1 May 1917 (Miami, Florida); “Five Admitted to Citizenship,” *Times-Picayune*, 15 January 1918; “Aliens to Study at Night School for Examination,” *Times-Picayune*, 29 October 1929.

³⁶ Frederic J. Haskin, “The Alien Again,” *Times-Picayune*, 14 January 1918.

were “susceptible to bad influences.”³⁷ According to this line of thinking, encouraging immigrants to naturalize was about helping to “build up and strengthen the ideals of Americanism” and about nurturing “loyalism.”³⁸

At the same time, other press accounts worried that access to citizenship was too readily conferred on “foreigners.”³⁹ The *Daily Picayune* worried that “The immigrant who puts on American citizenship for convenience merely, who is ready to shed it as he sheds his coat and to espouse the cause of a foreign country against America regardless, is—to put it as mildly as possible—not yet fit for naturalization.”⁴⁰ St. Clair Adams, a local New Orleanian politician suggested that immigrants should not even be allowed to land if they did not declare their intention to naturalize and went as far as advocating that immigrants should be deported if they did not learn to read and write in English within five years.⁴¹ He continued, “We do not want immigrants who come here to feed on our fat, bask in our sunshine and live on our wealth until they are sleek and fat, then go back to their native countries and live at ease.”⁴²

These shifting sentiments included legislative ramifications. In 1917, both houses of Congress passed the literacy test for a fourth time. Although the bill received a presidential veto for a fourth time as well, Congress overrode President Wilson’s veto, thus passing the bill into law. Southern support for the legislation was

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ “Foreign Born Told the Advantages of Citizenship,” *Times-Picayune*, 12 October 1917.

³⁹ “Naturalization of Aliens,” *Times-Picayune*, 7 August 1915; “Naturalization,” *Times-Picayune*, 27 November 1919; “The Making of a Citizen,” *Miami Herald*, 21 March 1920. (Miami, Florida)

⁴⁰ “Naturalization of Aliens,” *Times-Picayune*, 7 August 1915.

⁴¹ “Foreign Born Told the Advantages of Citizenship,” *Times-Picayune*, 12 October 1917.

⁴² Ibid.

widespread. In the debate “Over President’s Veto, a Bill to Regulate the Immigration of Aliens to and the Residence of Aliens in the U.S.,” all representatives and senators in Alabama, Florida and Mississippi voted in favor.⁴³ Louisiana legislators remained somewhat split with Senator Ransdell Joseph voting “nay” and Senator Robert Broussard not voting; Joseph was joined by three of Louisiana’s eight representatives in registering their opposition against the House Resolution to overturn the President’s veto.⁴⁴ This shift in voting patterns signals that southerners by 1917 were nearly categorically registering opposition for unrestricted immigration.

The 1920s brought the zenith of immigration limitations, as Congress implemented the quota regime, first with the Emergency Quota Act in 1921 and then the proposed Johnson-Reed Act or National Origins Act in 1924. With regards to legislation set to disproportionately limit Southern and Eastern European immigration and virtually halt Asian immigration, southern legislators spoke with one voice. Unlike previous debates, by 1924, all voting Representatives and Senators from Alabama, Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi voted in favor of the “Bill to Limit the Immigration of Aliens into the United States.”⁴⁵ Signaling a full-scale shift in southern attitudes towards the arrival of new immigrants, legislators in the Gulf South

⁴³ “TO PASS H.R. 10384, (39 STAT. 874, 2-5-17), OF THE ... -- Senate Vote #324 -- Feb 5, 1917,” *GovTrack.us*, accessed March 14, 2017, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/64-2/s324>; “TO PASS H. R. 10384 (39 STAT. 874, FEB. 5, ... -- House Vote #121 -- Feb 1, 1917,” *GovTrack.us*, accessed March 14, 2017, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/64-2/h121>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Of note, the representatives who voted “nay” hailed from the first, second and third congressional districts, which included the southeastern corner of the state and New Orleans, thus suggesting that even in 1917, demands for immigrant labor conflicted with immigration policy in certain Louisiana locales.

⁴⁵ “TO AGREE TO THE REPORT OF CONFERENCE COMMITTEE ON H.R. ... -- House Vote #90 -- May 15, 1924,” *GovTrack.us*, accessed March 14, 2017, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/68-1/h90>; “TO AGREE TO REPORT OF CONFERENCE COMMITTEE ON H.R. 7995, ... -- Senate Vote #126 -- May 15, 1924,” *GovTrack.us*, accessed March 14, 2017, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/68-1/s126>.

who had previously advocated an open door policy for immigrant labor had now adopted the national/northern perspective that sought to limit the arrival of dangerous, unassimilable “aliens.”

What of those immigrants, specifically Italians, already residing in the Gulf South by 1924? In May of 1924, Joseph Rini and five other Italian Americans were hanged by the state of Louisiana for the alleged murder of a local restaurant owner.⁴⁶ Unlike the lynchings of the 1890s, this was a legal (albeit based on circumstantial evidence and suspect court proceedings), state-led execution, the largest in Louisiana history. According to scholarly analysis of the incident, this execution suggests a certain amount of residual nativism that still considered Italians and Italian Americans as violently suspect and validated violence against them as a means to quash the Mafia. Socially, scholars additionally note that Italians were not allowed to participate alongside native-born whites in the Carnival Balls during Mardi Gras until the 1960s.⁴⁷ Yet, with the continued passage of time and without the constant influx of new immigrants within the era of the quota regime, second and third generation immigrants became further detached from the ancestral homes.⁴⁸ As they exited ethnic enclaves and developed relationships with non-Italian Americans,

⁴⁶ John V. Baiamonte, *Spirit of Vengeance: Nativism and Louisiana Justice, 1921-1924* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).

⁴⁷ Vincenza Scarpaci, “Walking the Color Line: Italian Immigrants in Rural Louisiana, 1880-1910,” in *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America*, ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York: Routledge, 2003), 60–76.

⁴⁸ Thomas A Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

neighborhoods in Louisiana became less ethnically segregated after WWII; according to one assessment, by 1970, Italians were “thoroughly Americanized.”⁴⁹

Certainly, Italians steadily made their way into the native-born white mainstream, perhaps even earlier than some scholars have previously suggested. Yet, even in this later era, the racial transiency of Italians in the Gulf South persisted. Italian whiteness was sometimes disavowed, while other moments reveal the affirmation of their whiteness. Violence, labor conflict and nativism may have delayed this “whitening” process, while voting and marriage laws expedited the “whitening” of Italians in other contexts. By introducing the transnational construction of Italian-ness into the Jim Crow narrative, we expose the fungibility of racial construction and discover that Italians were racially categorized differently, sometimes white and sometimes not, in different moments and for different reasons. Such transiency meant that in their very act of confounding the black/white paradigm, ethnic immigrants reconfigured conceptions of race and citizenship and contributed (unintentionally) to the codification of exclusionary racial practices. Ultimately, because of this transiency, Italians helped to both disrupt and consolidate the region’s racially binary discourse and profoundly alter the legal and ideological landscape of the Gulf South at the turn-of-the-century.

⁴⁹ Anthony V Margavio and Jerome J Salomone, *Bread and Respect: The Italians of Louisiana* (Gretna, La.: Pelican Pub. Co., 2002), 264–66.

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